# MY TWENTY - ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS

by
Totaram Sanadhya

# MY TWENTY - ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS

and

# THE STORY OF THE HAUNTED LINE

For Rena & Mike,
All the best!
John

TOTARAM SANADHYA

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Translated and edited by John Dunham Kelly and
Uttra Kumari Singh

**FIJI MUSEUM**
**1991**

Published by the Fiji Museum, Suva, Fiji.
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Translations: Uttra Kumari Singh and John Dunham Kelly.

Introductions and Appendices: John Dunham Kelly.

Printed and bound by Quality Print Ltd., Suva, Fiji.
Phone: 313311, 313369, 313537

ISBN - 982-208-003-4

Publication of this book has been made possible by the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund.

Cover photograph: Girmitiyas carry rubber, watched by an overseer.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Permission for the publication of these translations was granted in 1984 by Benarsidas Chaturvedi. We thank him and remember him, and hope that this publication will make his thoughts more available to a new generation in Fiji. For permission to conduct the archival research connected with this project, we thank the Fiji National Archives (Setareki T. Tuinaceva, Archivist), and for help and advice in that research, we thank Margaret Patel of the Archives staff. For providing the Hindi manuscript which we have translated as "The Story of the Haunted Line," we thank Surendra Prasad of Lautoka.

We are also very grateful to the staff of the Fiji Museum for everything involved in the publication of these translations: thanks to Fergus Clunie for the original decision to publish the manuscript, to Cushla Vula for her work preparing the manuscript, and to Gladys Stephen, to Kate Hindle, Acting Director, and to Fonmanu Kunusi, Publications Officer, for their efforts to see this project through. Finally, we appreciate very much the assistance of the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund in the financing of this publication.

## NOTES ON TRANSLATION

We have tried to follow the original texts as closely as possible, and have made no additions or deletions from the manuscripts we translated. For MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS we translated the fourth edition, published by Benarsidas Chaturvedi himself in 1973. We have not seen the earlier editions but are told by other scholars that the text is unchanged. For "The Story Of The Haunted Line" we translated from a typed devanagari manuscript, graciously provided by Mr. Surendra Prasad of Lautoka. Permission for the publication of both of these translations was granted by Benarsidas Chaturvedi.

Certain particular problems in translation deserve further comments. First, Hindi writing often contains far fewer explicit paragraph breaks than an English-reading audience is accustomed to. Thus, especially within "The Story Of The Haunted Line," we have added paragraph breaks where we thought it appropriate. Hindi syntax also allows for very long sentences which rarely but occasionally we were forced to break. In general, we tried to save them as sentence units, sometimes straining English syntax in the process. On one occasion in MY 21 YEARS, we reorganized the sentences in a paragraph, because an organization which read well in Hindi was confusing when rendered into English. All chapter and section headings are arranged as in the original.

Next, there is the matter of idiomatic expressions. These also we tried to save, whenever they made sense in English -- for instance, that "there wasn't even space on the street for a sesame seed" on the occasion of Manilal's arrival. However, we occasionally judged an idiom to be too obscure or misleading in English, and substituted another phrasing for it. For instance, rather than "To teach about religion is a very crooked rice-pudding," we entered, 'To teach about religion is a very difficult thing."

Next, there is the matter of Hindi words retained in the text. Hindi words which have gained a life of their own in English discourse in Fiji, for instance ghee and dal, we retained. We also retained a special set of words which have gained notoriety and special significance in discussions about Indenture history -- girmit, arkati, sardar, i.e. Indenture contract, recruiter, work boss. Other Hindi words of special cultural significance, for instance sadhu and sidha, are both noted and translated in the text. Wherever necessary explanatory footnotes have been provided. All numbered footnotes are translators' additions; the note marked by an asterisk in "The Story Of The Haunted Line" is an important part of the original story.

The original Hindi-language MY 21 YEARS also includes many quotations in English, e.g. from writings of J.W. Burton and Hannah Dudley. Except for the quotations from C.F. Andrews, these were not translated into Hindi, but were quoted in English. Occasionally, errors in syntax and punctuation are found in these quoted passages, which may not have existed in the originals. We have reproduced these passages as they originally appeared in MY 21 YEARS.

Finally there is the matter of orthography -- writing these words in Roman letters. Hindi and English phonemic systems are so different that what devanagari script can capture quite elegantly, the Roman alphabet must struggle to approximate. In general we have followed the transliteration system Rodney Moag used in his FIJI HINDI primer, with one change: marking rather than doubling of vowels to show length. However, whenever there is a different but publicly accepted transliteration, especially for names, but also for such words as "arkati," we have used it in order to facilitate recognition. Our worst orthographic problems were with words and sentences in Fijian, with its third phonemic system, published in devanagari. If we had simply followed standard transliteration rules, "Jo" would have come out "Chyau." We would like to thank Martha Kaplan for helping to reconstruct Totaram Sanadhya's Fijian, including his occasional mistakes.

# "MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS"

## INTRODUCTION

by

John Dunham Kelly

You hold in your hands a unique book. While a great number of books have been written about the Indenture system and the lives of girmitiya labourers in Fiji and elsewhere, only this one was written at the time of Indenture, from the Indian point of view, and from first-hand experience of the life of the girmitiyas in Fiji.

From 1879 to 1916, 60,537 Indians came to Fiji under contract to do five years of labour. The vast majority chose to stay in Fiji after the termination of their labour contract, and their descendants make up the majority of Fiji's current India-descended, "Indo-Fijian" population. FIJIDWIP MEN MERE IKKIS VARSH, or MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS, gives special insight into their experience and history.

Also included in this volume is "Bhut Lane ki Katha," or "The Story Of The Haunted Line," another short piece by Totaram Sanadhya about his life in Fiji. This edition is the first published translation into English of these works.

## THE BOOK AND ITS AUTHORS

Totaram Sanadhya is the man who spent twenty-one years in Fiji and then returned to India. There he devoted the remainder of his life to fighting the Indentured labour system which had originally sent him to Fiji. He was by all accounts a remarkable man. His final departure from Fiji in 1914 was a major event, gaining notice even in the PACIFIC HERALD:

> Tota Ram is leaving for good and his departure is much felt by the Indians of Fiji, as he has been one of the leading Aryan lecturers and debaters in the colony. It is noteworthy that Pandit

> Tota Ram is the first Indian who has received an address from his fellow countrymen in Fiji. (March 30, 1914)

The text of this address, quoted by Benarsidas Chaturvedi in his introduction to the second edition of this book, makes clear both the esteem for Sanadhya held by his countrymen in Fiji, and his many efforts on their behalf, even before leaving Fiji:

> We will be indebted our whole lives for all your good deeds in the twenty-one years you have lived among the Fiji-dwelling Indians. Flying the flag of Sanatan Dharm in Fiji you have made all of us inclined towards religion. God will give you the reward for these deeds. You corresponded with Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Manilal and in the course of collecting money to call Dr. Manilal you expended your own personal earnings, went to plantations in the bush and in the mountains and not seeing your wife and children, collected 2600 rupees and called Dr. Manilal. It is not improper to say that Dr. Manilal came by your hard work. The government of India sent a commission to investigate our sorrows. The Fiji Agent General gave the news of the coming investigation to the white landlords. We didn't even dream that the commission would come. Showing your intelligence at this time, you took the notice of the coolie agent about the commission's investigation, had it translated into Hindi, and sent it to each and every plantation. . . . . On seeing what happened to Kunti, it was you who had it published in the newspapers of India, and sent it as far as the leaders of the Indian government. You also told the Agent General that the government should accept the Hindu and Muslim religious marriages.....

Totaram Sanadhya came to Fiji on the twenty-fourth ship to bring girmitiyas, the Jumna. He arrived, age seventeen, on 28 May 1893. Like many Brahmans of the time, he was not registered as a Brahman on his indenture pass - it says instead that he was a Thakur. A glimpse of Totaram Sanadhya while in Fiji is to be found in the writings of the missionary

COLONIAL EMIGRATION FORM No. 44.

# MAN'S
## EMIGRATION PASS.

HEALTH CLASS.

DEPÔT No.

For Ship "Jumna" PROCEEDING TO FIJI.

No. 13.

Fiji Government Emigration Agency,
12, GARDEN REACH, KIDDERPORE,
CALCUTTA, the 26th Feb 1893.

PARTICULARS OF REGISTRATION. Place, Allahabad.
Date, 2. 2. 93.
No. in Register 37.

Name, Tota Ram.

Father's Name, Redi Ram.

Age, 16.

Caste, Thakur.

Name of next-of-kin, Ramlal, Bro.

If married, name of wife, —

District, Agra.

Thana, Firozabad.

Village or Town & Mahalla, Sirangpoo,

Bodily Marks, Scars of Cuts.

Height, 5 Feet — Inches.

CERTIFIED that we have examined and passed the above named Man as fit to emigrate; that he is free from all bodily and mental disease; and that he has been vaccinated since engaging to emigrate.

DATED
The

*Surgeon Superintendent.*

*Depôt Surgeon.*

CERTIFIED that the Man above described has appeared before me and has been engaged by me on behalf of the Government of FIJI as willing to proceed to that country to work for hire; and that I have explained to him all matters concerning his engagement and duties. This has also been done at the time of registration by the registering officer appointed by the Indian Government.

DATED
The 19/2/93

*Government Emigration Agent for FIJI.*

PERMITTED to proceed as in a fit state of health to undertake the voyage to FIJI.

DATED
The 21/2/93

*Protector of Emigrants.*

P. S. D'Rozario and Co., Printers, Calcutta.—500—11-92.

Totaram's girmit pass. Note that he was registered as a Thakur but was in fact a Brahman.

J.W. Burton. On the one hand, Burton was shocked and dismayed by what he perceived of as the paganistic practices of the man, but on the other hand, he had great respect for his intelligence. Burton writes:

> On every face there is the maddest enthusiasm. "Ram! Ram! Bless us!" The people shout. "Ram! Ram! Sitaram! Hear us!" They cry. See the face of that man there! Can that be the same clear-headed, cool debater we know as Totaram? Yes. It is he. But this is Hinduism in ecstasy --- not in argument -- which is very different.

When Burton wrote the following passage, he almost certainly had his experiences with this "cool debater" in mind. He is known to have conversed often with Sanadhya, and the account is a nice counterpoint to Sanadhya's comments about Burton in MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS.

> "Padri sahib, why do you come here so often?" The speaker was a clever and well-educated Brahman with the finely chiselled features and lofty brow so typical of his kind. "Do you think that you will ever convert me?" He laughed with mingled pride and courtesy upon his face; but the pride leapt forward and spoke. "I am of the sacred thread; my ancestors, long generations before you were born, worshipped after this way. They discovered the only way for my caste, and our feet love the path. They spent their whole lives -- not in winning bread not in accmulating wealth -- but in thinking about religion. For five thousand years they have been thinking, and here are their thoughts." He tapped his Vedas gently with his finger. "There are thoughts here that you English, clever as you are in science and machines, can never understand. All the good and true things in your Bible -- love to the neighbor, forgiveness of injuries, purity of life and motive -- and many more beside. Don't think, please, that I dislike your coming. I am glad to talk about religion with any fair-minded man; but do not deceive yourself that you will ever influence me. The chances of your becoming a Hindu are much

> greater than those of my becoming a Christian. You may convert a few pariahs and ignorant men for whom Christianity is probably the best thing they can embrace. Your big missions in India are doing that -- but I am not of that class. I am one who knows. Why do you come here so often, padri sahib?"

"Thus speaks Hinduism," concludes Burton, finding in Totaram Sanadhya the essence of his religion.

Totaram Sanadhya organized what may have been the first Ram Lila festival in Fiji, in Navua in 1902, and he managed the Ram Lila there for seven or eight years. He was simultaneously a political leader: in 1912 he drafted and sent the telegram of support from Fiji Indians for Rajrishi Gokhale's resolution before the Indian Legislative Council to end the Indenture system. His other accomplishments in Fiji will be apparent as one reads his book, but not his activities in India. After arriving in India, he travelled widely to lecture against Indenture, and his work reached a pinnacle in his half-hour long Hindi language address at the Madras Congress, to which he was the Fiji Indian respresentative.

Totaram Sanadhya spent the end of his life at the Sabarmati Ashram, with other followers of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi himself wrote a eulogy for him on his death:

> Aged Totaram Ji died without suffering. He was an ornament to the Sabarmati Ashram. He was not a scholar, yet he was wise. He was a collector of bhajans, but not a scholar of music. With his single-wired instrument he used to charm the people of the ashram. Just as he was, so was his wife. But Totaram died first!
>
> Wherever people have gathered, there are conflicts. I do not remember any single incident in which this couple participated, or were in any way the cause. Totaram loved the earth. The fields were his life. He came to the ashram years ago and did not ever leave. They found unfailing encouragement from him.
>
> He was a strong Hindu, but his heart was

equally disposed towards Hindus, Muslims, and those of other faiths. On him was not even the smell of untouchability, and he had no vices at all. He took no part in politics. Still, his love for his country was strong enough to stand any comparison. Renunciation was easy for him. He adorned the ashram.

He went to the Fiji Islands as a girmitiya. Dinbandhu Andrews found him. Benarsidas Chaturvedi brought him to the ashram. Up to his last moment, whatever help he needed was given by the wife of brother Guram Rasul Kureshi and Imam sahab's sister. "The lives of good people are for the sake of others" - for Totaram this was completely true.[1]

Totaram Sanadhya thus led a full and influential life. However his most influential action was none of the above: it was, instead, his role in the writing of this book, MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS, which we shall hereafter call MY 21 YEARS. When this book was published in India in 1914, it caused a sensation beyond even the hopes of its "author" and "editor." Such contemporary observers as the

---

1. This maxim, apparantly one of Totaram's favourites, is quoted by Gandi in Sanskrit. In MY 21 YEARS it is quoted, in slightly different form, by Totaram himself (or perhaps by Benarsidas Chaturvedi). It is the last quarter of a shloka from the HITOPADESHA:

"The fruit of trees is for the sake of others, The flowing of rivers is for the sake of others, The milk of cows is for the sake of others, The lives of good people are for the sake of others."

Special thanks to Pandit Jagdish Chandra of the Lakshmi Narayan temple for providing the full shloka and naming its source.

Rev. Charles Andrews, who himself wrote an influential report on indentured labour, gave MY 21 YEARS great credit for exposing injustices, rousing public opinion, and thus helping to end the Indenture system. Soon after its publication it was translated into many languages of both north and south India. Until now, however, there has been no published translation into English.

Ironically, this greatest work of Totaram Sanadhya is in another sense not his work at all. As he himself freely admitted, he had no great skills or competence as a writer. This book would never have been written had he not met a young writer and journalist, Benarsidas Chaturvedi, who saw the great prospects for a book "by" Totaram Sanadhya. For fifteen days Totaram Sanadhya told his story to Benarsidas Chaturvedi, who at the time was an aspiring editor of his own newspaper and journal, but also, to make ends meet, a teacher in a government school. Benarsidas Chaturvedi then wrote a book, and published it as MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS, by Totaram Sanadhya.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

MY 21 YEARS is written in a simple engaging style. It tells stories as often as it analyzes or generalizes. Thus in one sense it is easily comprehended. At another level, however, it is a very difficult book to read properly and learn from.

A careful reader must approach this book with several questions and issues in mind. The first set of questions and issues deal with the book's purpose, intended audience and genre. Why was this book written? For whom? What kind of arguments was that audience used to? What did it expect of a book? A second set of questions and issues deal with the book's authorship, an obvious problem given the context of the book's production. And a third set, in my opinion the most important set, deal with the book's presuppositions. Let us discuss these sets of questions and issues separately.

(1) The most important fact for a reader to begin with is that this book was not written for us. This is true whether the "we" in question are Indo-Fijians, Fijians, "Europeans"

like myself, or even citizens of present-day India. Its principal intended audience was the Indian intellectual community of the early 1900's and we are intruders listening to an argument not meant for us. MY 21 YEARS makes frequent appeal to its readers, addressing them directly, trying to shame them to action. Remembering who those "readers" are, one can grasp why these appeals are made at the particular points they appear in the text, and through these appeals, what the main purpose of the book was.

When we read history books we are all used to a particular kind of narrative voice: the kind of voice used by K.L. Gillion and Ahmed Ali, for example, in their writings on Indenture. If we imagine that we are listening to this kind of voice here, then we will not learn what MY 21 YEARS has to teach, and we will sometimes be dramatically misled. Professional historians share an orientation to writing history which is missing in MY 21 YEARS. It cannot properly be called "objective," because all books or texts are written with particular purposes in mind. All are guided by the particular points the author has to make, and even the selection and presentation of facts is governed by this interest on the part of the author to make his or her point. An "objective" text could not have anything to say, any standard for what is relevant or not relevant, any reason for wanting the attention of particular readers. What professional historians share, then, is not "objectivity" but these things: an idea of who their readers are, a general purpose, and an accepted set of standards for what is or is not relevant. This is what makes "history" a genre, a recognized type of writing.

All historians have the same audience in mind: not just their contemporaries but also future generations, who may know little or nothing about the subject of the book. To make their points to this audience, then, historians share a basic idea about what the contents of their books should be. History books should contain accurate information, which is complete enough to introduce an unfamiliar reader to the time, place and people in question, and which is sufficient to prove the points about those people and their history which the historian is out to prove. Finally, and most importantly, the points historians mean to make are of the same general kind. Their purpose is to inform, to teach, to add to someone's knowledge. A particularly ambitious historian might seek to shape one's general attitude towards society and history -- a nationalist historian to make one a patriot, a Marxist historian to make one a Marxist. But

this is as far as a true historian will go. He cannot seek to direct his audience to undertake particular programs of action, for instance, because his audience is presumed to exist in many different times, places and contexts.

Totaram Sanadhya and Benarsidas Chaturvedi are not historians, because this is not their outlook. One should not think that my point here is that they have failed to reach the standards of professional historians. While this is true, it is the case only because they were not trying to meet these standards. Their audience was smaller, but their purpose much greater. They wanted to end the Indenture system. To do so they wrote a book for a target audience of educated, influential and powerful people who were their contemporaries in the India of their day, and they wrote that book in order to shock and arouse that audience, to make it join in political action. Thus the genre of this book is not history, but polemic.

Because their book is a polemic the authors select evidence differently than a historian would. First, because their audience is limited, they feel no need to give definitions or detailed descriptions of facets of Indian customs which their audience already knew about. To help counteract this, this translation is provided with definitions and descriptions, in footnotes, of aspects of Indian custom and culture which might be obscure to non-Indians. Secondly, and more importantly, because they seek to motivate their readers to action, their account is passionate. They will dwell in ways that will seem obsessive on particular incidents and details with which they hope to outrage their readers. And further, when they present and analyze facts they are governed by an interest not only to show girmit conditions to be harsh, but more, to show things to be so unacceptable that immediate action on the reader's part was warranted.

We as readers come to this book as if it was a history book, but in order to read it as a history book we need in effect, to recalibrate it. While footnotes can add necessary missing information, the new reader must do the rest for himself or herself, and wonder in each case how the polemical presentation reflects or distorts the historical reality.

(2) Next is the issue of authorship. Behind the question, 'who wrote what we are reading?', is the question, 'on whose authority is this or that claim true?' Totaram Sanadhya and Benarsidas Chaturvedi brought very different types of authority to bear on this project. One speaks near the end

of his life, not as an expert on evidence or rhetoric, but sure in the knowledge of what he has experienced. The other writes with the developing skills that later made him famous, dependent on his analytical abilities and literary energy. But the latter, Benarsidas Chaturvedi, was never himself in Fiji.

As the readers we want to assess statements from these two differnt sources differently. From Totaram Sanadhya we want to know the facts, and we have good reason to believe he knows them. From Benarsidas Chaturvedi comes good order to their presentation and a sure hand in pointing out their implications. Or at least, this is how the book should function according to its design. Can we know that this is how it is constructed in fact?

We do know the following: the book was first published listing Totaram Sanadhya as author, with no mention of an editor. But as Benarsidas Chaturvedi make clear in a new preface to a later edition, this was so only because Benarsidas Chaturvedi depended at that time on his employment as a government teacher, and would have lost his job if associated with a book advocating agitation against government policy. Later editions list Benarsidas Chaturvedi as editor, in partial rectification. However he was more than editor, since Totaram Sanadhya never produced a written text himself.

By his own account, Benarsidas Chaturvedi was no more than a "clerk," producing the work Totaram Sanadhya would have produced if he had the skills. Chaturvedi says that he "made the story wear pajamas." But what were these pajamas made of? Were details of fact and description added by an imagination in India, or simply pulled together from a rambling description of Fijian realities?

I have no source of evidence to settle this issue for us conclusively. We can only inspect the text and wonder, looking at clues. Sections naming Fiji's lattitude and longitude, number of islands and so forth would seem more likely to have come straight from an encyclopedia than by way of Totaram Sanadhya. At other times our narrator makes observations in his own voice, for instance that one is deeply moved seeing the faces of women returning from the fields after a day's hard labour, that are also part of passages quoted in MY 21 YEARS from other sources, in this case Hannah Dudley's letter. Thus the pajamas might involve facts from other sources. Other passages, on the other hand, read vividly as first person narrative, and it becomes

difficult to imagine them as anything but transcriptions or virtual transcriptions of Totaram Sanadhya's account. Finally, the reader will note even through the translation that the style of writing is not consistent throughout the book. Sometimes sentences are blunt and choppy, sometimes they are florid. Even Hindi vocabulary would vary in its difficulty through the text, some sections sending the native speaker to the dictionary with great frequency, others read with ease by the non-native speaker.

We cannot here resolve which passages reflect Chaturvedi's influence more, or what the true impact of that influence on the text is. In his review of Hindi literature about Fiji, K.S. Kanwal suggests that there is a relative harshness to Chaturvedi's judgements about conditions in Fiji which may be related to his lack of first-hand experience. A reader trying to weigh a particular argument, or imagine for himself the true conditions of girmitiya life in general, must keep these issues in mind as well.

(3) Finally, come what are to me the most important issues and questions about the book, those having to do with presuppositions, what the book reveals about itself and its subjects without even trying. The issues here are very different than those discussed before.

Up to now the main points have been cautionary, and we have seen reasons to be critical about evidence and arguments made in the book. Now if you are worried that the book may not be worth reading after all, I want to suggest just the opposite. The book is a sure source of great insight about the Indenture system and the Indians made "coolies" within it. It does not merely report facts that are unavailable elsewhere about what the British always called "the Indenture system." It also reflects the truth from the girmitiya point of view, the reality of that time as perceived by the Indians themselves. For this it is invaluable: it is our bridge into the participants' point of view in a particular historical episode, the cultural beliefs of a particular time and place.

This kind of insight is not delivered to us directly. An author is of course incapable of telling us how he or she differs from us in perceptions and beliefs, how he or she is the same. In any case, basic beliefs are not the subject of this book, and our authors are indeed quite focussed on what is their purpose, exposing the evils of Indenture. Still they cannot help but reveal themselves, and in stories and

narratives, reveal basic facts about the Indians in Fiji of their time. If we are searching for these truths then we can find them.

These things can come in direct statements, but more often they are present in what is presupposed by the authors' discussions and observations. Sometimes, for instance, in particular stories the motives of individuals won't make sense, or the injustice they feel won't be comprehensible, without knowledge of the particular Indian cultural principles and beliefs involved. Thus when a Brahman is forced to eat his meals with people of all castes, and re-use another man's plate, the first may seem unremarkable and the second merely unsanitary unless one knows about caste practices with respect to food, drink, status and purity. Then one realizes the incident as outrageous -- and from the fact that the relevant rules are not noted in the text, one learns that all in the audience were presumed to already know about the practices, and to identify with them enough to have felt the outrage without any elaboration. When the branding of cattle is listed among the great troubles in Fiji, amid tales of oppression and injustice to men, we can glimpse the veneration of cattle among Hindus. These two examples merely verify the type of Hinduism held by writers and audience however. More interesting and complex lessons can be learned from other descriptions and expressions, especially those involved in the accounts of the labour system and the labourer's world.

Why is the "Indenture system" called the "kulî prathâ," in effect the "coolie system," rather than the "girmit prathâ," which, like "Indenture system," would refer to the contract as the main feature of the system? Why are the arkatis or labour recruiters always described as having "fooled" or "tricked" (bahakânâ) the labourers into coming? Why are the overseers and others described as committing atyâchârs, "outrages" or "atrocities," and the Indians in Fiji described as suffering kaShT, "hardships, distresses, troubles"?

One approach to the text making these assertions is to take these terms as translated at face-value, for instance to simply equate "kuli pratha" and "Indenture system," and then to try to decide whether the reality of the time and place fit these terms. For instance, did recruiters scheme to mislead their recruits? How hard were the hardships? Quite a different approach, and the approach I advocate, is to ask why these "coolies" applied these terms to their reality. The latter is an exercise in analyzing meaning,

or a path that leads ultimately to the meaning for those involved in the indenture experience itself.

Sometimes these presuppositions are easy to realize. For instance, the authors persist in calling girmitiyas "foreign dwelling Indians," and often call on their "countrymen" in India to come to their aid. Thus a sense of separate identity for Indo-Fijians was not yet articulated. At other times, only greater efforts in questioning and comparison will reveal connections and significances, meanings which are there in the text, to be sure, but embedded so deeply in the structure of thought and argument that one will never simply stumble over them. In the second half of this introduction I will give you my reading of some of these meanings, and I welcome all to consider it, but also to examine the issue for themselves. What did the girmit history mean to those involved? With this question in mind, reading MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS cannot fail to be interesting.

## GIRMIT REALITY AS DESCRIBED IN MY 21 YEARS

We are fortunate to have Totaram Sanadhya as our explicator of girmit realities. While he is certainly not "average," such a notion of "averageness" is an abstraction which could not be realized in a single real text with a single author in any case. In Totaram Sanadhya we have a source who travelled widely, and as the book itself makes clear, did a great deal of informal research into the beliefs and attitudes of his people. Further, he was sometimes chosen to represent them.

Because of his experience as a political actor, Sanadhya's account is perhaps heavily concerned with legal and administrative issues that other girmitiyas might not have made so central. But we have an independent ground for believing that many of his primary perceptions and concerns were widely shared in the Fiji Indian community of his time.

The accounts of the girmit experience of surviving girmitiyas, such as those recorded by Ali (1979), usually share the same emphases. Common themes include (1) the tricks and deceits of the recruiters, (2) the loss of caste and social and moral degeneration in the lines, (3) the harshness

and brutalities of white overseers, and (4) girmit life as a time of hardships and problems in general. These themes stressed by those looking back through fifty years of personal and national history are also found in MY 21 YEARS, and they are here expressed with both completeness and wealth of detail. Thus girmitiyas are invariably described as having been fooled or deceived by the arkatis before coming, and details of many cases, notably Totaram Sanadhya's own, are given. Thus great attention is paid to stressing the social and moral needs of the girmitiyas, religious teachers are urged to come to their aid, and a very interesting plea is made with respect to their caste standing. Third, not only the harshness of British overseers but the racism of an entire colonial order of white sahabs is described. And finally, unceasing attention is given to all of the great hardships and problems, in Hindi the kaShT, of the girmitiyas, which as we shall see are to Sanadhya the most important thing of all. In short, while we should keep in mind that the authors of this work have their own particular points to make, we can also hope that this work will illuminate these main features of the indenture experience as peceived by the girmitiyas.

Let us now consider the four themes one by one.

## The KaShT of the girmitiyas

We will start with the last of the four themes as listed above, the general perception of girmit as a time of hardships and problems. J.W. Burton, the missionary writing for a Christian audience, and most scholars since have summed up this girmitiya perception as a belief that life in the lines was hell, in Hindi "narak." MY 21 YEARS does not stress narak, but instead stresses the omnipresence of kaShT, i.e. hardships, distress, troubles, problems. Obviously, life was difficult for the girmitiyas and both of these descriptions capture that fact. But behind this similarity is a large difference on a crucial question. Christians know that Hell is for sinners, and similarly, wicked deeds would deliver one to narak. But in the descriptions of MY 21 YEARS, the "foreign-dwelling Indians" are always simple, helpless, and above all, innocent. How then could they land in such difficulty? This is an important theological question, a question about the workings of karma.

A terrible stereotype of karma beliefs is promulgated by most textbook descriptions of Indian world view. One is taught that Indians believe in an all-embracing

determinism, a system in which all aspects of their lives and fates are a prescribed moral consequence of their past actions. In such a world there could be no innocents in distress. The cause and culprit for any misfortune could only be one's own self. Even if someone else's action was the material cause of one's own suffering, reaction against that person would not be reasonable since they could only be the instrument of fate, a fate one's own acts had determined.

This kind of negation of all other agents does have a place in some South Asian theological doctrines, notably in the Buddhist and many of the Vedantic traditions, but that place is always restricted. The realm of activity in which no other agent is a factor, and one's fate is entirely in one's own hands, is the quest for deliverance. It is perhaps fair to say that karma in all these theologies was a mechanism of self-determined fate in the following sense: one's own moral acts would absolutely determine one's closeness to god or absolute release, and, inversely, one's degree of attachment to worldly interests and pursuits. Beyond this, many, but by no means all karma theories (produced in thousands of years of South Asian history) find that one's caste standing and social rank and career are a direct reflection and concommitant of one's karmic standing, a level of "purity." But even in areas where such a karmic basis to caste organization and ranking is unquestioned, there is still no belief in a world without villains.

What were the boundaries of fate and the rules for blame, as viewed by the girmitiyas? Was the suffering of indenture their karma? Or could it have been some kind of accident? Girmitiyas were not faced merely with the two choices which "modernization" stereotypes can imagine for them. They did not have to either reject their traditional world view or else accept its all-embracing determinism, and in this case conclude that they had to be deeply sinful people, deserving of their coolie status. Their world view was considerably more complex and flexible. For a sketch of their options in understanding their troubles, let us turn to research done in a conservative part of Uttar Pradesh in India, the region from which the majority of Fiji's girmitiyas were recruited. The analysis hinges on two opposed ideas of misfortune:

> Sorrows, dukh, are generally due to one's actions and related to one's fortune (bhagy).

> Distress, kaShT, is due primarily to the actions of others, especially enemies in this life, and are not in one's fortune. (Wadley p.111)

This "bhagy" or fortune, the tangible fruits of one's karma, can thus be blocked or otherwise altered by the interference of others. If one is in a situation of dukh, suffering, one has to change one's karma and thus one's bhagy by proper actions, notably including proper prayers and ritual attention to one's relations with god. However if one is in a situation of kaShT then a different kind of response is required. The block and the interference must be removed before proper religious practice can go on and bear fruit. Anyone with a knowledge of Hindu mythology should be able to think of several stories which begin with a demonic figure gaining great powers through his own karma and then using them to interfere in the lives and fortunes of others. For instance, in the Ramayan, Ram comes to earth in part because he has been called to put an end to the kaShT caused by Ravan.

Was the "hell" of Indenture the karma of the girmitiyas or had they fallen into the hands of some demonic force? Not all girmitiya voices agree on this question, but clearly, the authors of MY 21 YEARS are out to prove the second. While they occasionally use the term dukh when describing the suffering of the Fiji Indians, their main emphasis is on kaShT.[1] But this alone is not the telling point. The words have different connotations on other grounds, dukh emphasizing mental states, kaShT material situations, a fact Wadley also notes. We need not bind the words rigidly to the distinction between types of misfortune, which is clearest

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1. In the translations (dukh) has been rendered as "sorrows" and "suffering," (kaShT) as "troubles," "hardships" and "problems," depending on the context. In "The Story of the Haunted Line" we have included these words in the text, in brackets, each place they are used, in order to give a sense of their use in context. They are used much more frequently in the main text - too frequently, in fact, to mark the uses without making the result quite disruptive. Interested readers should also note emphasis on kaShT in other Hindi language works concerning Indians in Fiji - for instance Pandit Ram Chandra Sharma's FIJI DIGDARSHAN (1937), whose subtitle translates as "The Honorable Story of the KaShT of Overseas Indians."

on other grounds. The telling point of MY 21 YEARS is the insistence on the innocence of the girmitiyas. Further, the authors are not reticent in identifying the cause of their kaShT.

## The atyâchâr of the British

"Atyâchâr" are "atrocities" or "outrages," and the word appears quite frequently in MY 21 YEARS and other accounts of girmitiya life. We have marked its use in the text only where it is used in a chapter title or sub-heading. According to our authors, beatings and other forms of violence were a part of the lives of coolies. However, the notion of "atrocity" or "outrage" one finds expressed here extends quite beyond the violence itself.

The outrages which our authors emphasize the most may or may not involve physical violence, but always end with injustice at the hands of European authority figures. Thus the Kabuli Pathans are shot at and starved, but the ultimate crime against them is that they are split up and sent to work at different plantations, after they had been promised the chance to stay and work together. Narayani was beaten near to death just after losing her child, but the story doesn't end until, despite her testimony, the overseer is found innocent.

This and other kinds of injustice are the essence of the girmitiya experience as MY 21 YEARS presents it. Overseers beat them, lawyers steal their money, merchants pay them less for what they sell and charge them more for what they buy, and government officers consistently fail to do their duty and provide the Indians protection. The girmitiyas are treated like prisoners and dogs. On the ship they get dog biscuits to eat, and prisoners' clothes. Upon their arrival at Nukulau Island, police surround them even when they haven't done anything. "We were treated worse than their servants there," Sanadhya says indignantly, and this is indeed the crux of the matter. They have been made into a new kind of people, forced into a new lowest social place. They are now "coolies." This is the reality reflected in the choice of "**kulî** prathâ" or "coolie system" as the reference term for what European colonialists always called the "Indenture system." The girmit or "agreement" binding the Indian to five years of labour was not a simple contract

between formally equal parties. Behind this reality lay another: once the simple Indian agreed to the girmit, he or she was doomed to be transformed into a coolie.

## The evil recruiters

This is perhaps why MY 21 YEARS so consistently describes all girmitiyas as "tricked" (bahakana) by the arkatis or recruiters, why the statements of officials explaining the terms and conditions of the contract are called "slippery-slidey talk." No one was explaining the underlying reality, the unjust social transformation to come, whatever other lies or truths were told, whatever other ruses and devices were or were not used.

This insistence on arkati trickery, in MY 21 YEARS and in the other recollections of girmit days, has been a puzzle to scholars, some of whom have distorted it by tangling it in a debate over whether immigration was "pushed" by the situation in India or "pulled" by the need for labour abroad (see for instance Lal). The authors of MY 21 YEARS are certainly not claiming, as they are stereotyped to claim, that arkati pull and trickery was the cause of the labour migration, to the exclusion of "push" factors. Indeed MY 21 YEARS makes very clear that starting points of difficulty and sorrow in India set the emigration in motion, whether it is bad treatment of young wives and widows, or as in Sanadhya's own case, poverty and a need for employment. Thus the significance of the emphasis on trickery is not as an explanation why Indenture to Fiji took place, but a description of what that experience was all about. The arkati's trick is a symbol, marking the fact that agreeing to girmit was bound to lead the unknowing to great social trauma. As our authors write:

> In our place, arkatis fool them and take them to the magistrate. The magistrate asks, "Are you agreed to go to Fiji?" As soon as the word "yes" leaves the lips, the registry is done. What would be the registry? From saying only "yes," there was five years of black water!

## The fate of caste

All observers, Indian and white, record a degeneration of Indian social and moral order in the coolie lines. Since that time it has become equally commonplace to note that the "caste system" did not survive in Fiji. But nowadays commentators often presume that caste organization died some kind of natural death in Fiji (for instance, most recently, Scarr p. 81). These accounts often involve more of the stereotyping of South Asian society noted earlier, now finding that by coming to Fiji, Indians broke the bonds of a rigid system, and moved from "ascribed" social roles to "freedom." As MY 21 YEARS shows, the movement was quite the opposite of this: into a rigid plantation heirarchy and imposed "coolie" status. The natural death stereotype suggests that without the controlling influence of their home society of elders, the emerging Fiji Indian society simply gave up caste rules and practices. MY 21 YEARS describes a more complex reality -- in which British officials seem determined to force caste order to be violated!

In the India of the times and places where girmitiyas were recruited, caste status was realized in a level of personal physical purity. Therefore, activities which could bring contact with sources of pollution, i.e. eating, drinking, clothing care etc., were very significant matters for caste-conscious Indians. Yet when the new girmitiyas were gathered in the Calcutta depot, they were all forced to eat together, and forced to eat off dirty plates. Later their clothes were taken away and they were all forced to wear the same kind of garments, "like prisoners." Finally, once reaching the plantation our narrator, a Brahman, was forced to live with a (low caste) Chamar and a Muslim, and he notes, "it is usually arranged this way." Protests over these matters led to hostility and punishment from the British authorities.

Caste status is dying no natural death in this situation. Precisely because the "coolie" has been polluted in so many ways, the experience of girmit has thrown his caste status into great doubt. The issue then is not simply whether he or she will choose to follow or not to follow a set of social rules, but is instead, what he or she can and will do in the new degraded situation.The Reverend Charles Andrews was struck in his first visit to Fiji by what he thought was the utter loss of dharma and religious interest among the indentured labourers, who were neither praying daily nor

undertaking most of the multiple and complex large-scale rituals characteristic of Hinduism. Then, in his return trip in the 1930's he was surprised and gratified to see what he thought was the return of dharma and religious practice. Indeed, the coolies' religious practice was crippled by the lack of pandits and other specialists available, and by the relative ignorance of the vast majority of the young labourers about such matters. And indeed there was an influx of religious specialists and a growth of religious knowledge in Fiji in the years after Indenture. But there is perhaps more involved in the question of religious practice among the girmitiyas.

If we return to consider the rules of religious practice as explained by Wadley, we shall see that the incidents of pollution and the rest of the kaShT of girmitiya life themselves should change the course of proper religious practice. Hindu daily prayers and other elaborate rituals are all keyed to a schedule, which names auspicious times and means for the gaining of religious merit. When performed properly by properly prepared devotees, the rituals are a way of gaining "punya" or merit, and of maintaining or improving one's degree of purity. Wadley writes, "The converse is also true. Occasions which are inauspicious are occasions when one cannot aquire merit -- actions on these occasions are not merit making" (p.150). One's own sins can create such inauspiciousness, or it can be the product of the actions of others, a "time of distress (kaShT ka samay)." Wadley writes,

> auspicious occasions require action following proper conduct and religious observances, and "inauspicious" occasions (to men) require dealing with a bad spirit who has acted or will act detrimentally. This malevolent spirit must be dealt with to cure man's distress. (p.151)

In their time of distress, the girmitiyas might thus have felt incapable of acquiring merit through a normal pattern of observances, not simply because their own polluted status made them unworthy. Instead, they first had to deal with their distress itself. They could do so two ways. First, they could appeal for help from a powerful mediator, with activity we would recognize as "religious." Second, they could confront the source of their kaShT directly, activity we would call "political."

(1) Religious redress of their kaShT: There was one type of religious practice very popular in the lines, as seen in "The Story of the Haunted Line," and also in the texts of girmitiya reminiscences, and the observations of J.W. Burton and Walter Gill. This was the singing and reciting of religious texts, notably the Ramayan. As "The Story of the Haunted Line" makes clear, this activity required less expertise and training than other rituals of panditry. Also, it was less dangerous for a heavily polluted man to undertake -- unlike other rituals with their complex exchanges, there is little chance with these rituals of improper performance or unworthy status causing a rebound of worse troubles from a mistreated deity. And finally, it could serve a very important purpose, precisely in line with the girmitiyas' predicament. As Wadley notes, one way to end times of kaShT, and transform an inauspicious time into an auspicious one, is to appeal to the great deities as intermediaries. Prayer to Ram, Brahma, Visnu and Shiva, and even the mere hearing of the words of the Ramayan, can be inherently elevating and purifying experiences. But also, one can appeal to these gods, or to Ram's own protector the popular Hanuman, for sharan or "shelter" from all sorrows and troubles. Further, one can even pray for specific help, to be rescued (bachnâ) from specific kaShT.

"The Story of the Haunted Line" is a lesson in the value of relying on God for shelter, and an example of rescue. These lessons are quite explicitly taught in that text. Not only in their Ramayan singing, but also in the other rituals which survived the girmit transformation, notably kathâ, another type of recitations, girmitiyas prayed for shelter and rescue from the hardships of their new circumstances.

(2) Political redress of their kaShT: Of course, one need not simply rely on gods for one's rescue, and this brings us to the second reaction to the kaShT -- and back to the guiding purpose and moral appeals of MY 21 YEARS. If one had the power one could also confront the source of trouble directly. The main purpose of MY 21 YEARS itself is to convince an Indian audience to aid in such a direct confrontation with the British. It seeks to show that the Indians in Fiji are weak innocents who are in need of rescue, rescue which the Indian populace as a whole would have the power to deliver. In this light the book can even be read in the context of an effort involving some of the same principals -- Gandhi, Andrews, Chaturvedi, etc. -- to rescue India itself from injustice, pollution and kaShT from the

same source, the British.

The form of the rescue planned for the Indians in Fiji is spelled out in the statements of duty given throughout the book, and especially at its conclusion. Lawyers and politicians bear particular weight. They are asked to agitate in India until all recruiting of labour for indenture is stopped, and they are asked to go directly to Fiji and to combat the injustices and evils of the system there. And one other group also bears a great weight of responsibility, the "great religious organizations" of India. They get the blame for some of the troubles in the first place (it is after all the kali yuga or age of degeneration of dharma). They have failed to teach dharma properly to the whole of India's population, thus allowing those who are innocent but ignorant to fall into traps and to be fooled into kaShT. It is their duty, then, to send teachers to undo the damage, to teach the ignorant the truth about religion and the world, and thus give them the means for undertaking full recovery.

It is historical fact that the politicians of India succeeded in forcing an end to the Indenture system, and that India's great religious organizations met their challenge, sent their missionaries and had a great impact on Indo-Fijian history. Thus, in a sense one could say that the rescue planned in MY 21 YEARS was completed. However, one particular plea by our authors was not met with the same success. They write,

> May I ask the speech-giving religious people of our country, what is the harm in mixing these people into the castes again? Oppressed by outrages of the home, fooled by the wicked arkatis, sent to a foreign country, what are the defects in this of these helpless people?

Thus our authors try to carry their innocence argument to its logical extreme, and try to find a return place for the coolies in the ranks of castes they left. However this was not to be. What was the defect in the girmitiyas that prevented their easy re-absorbtion into the castes? In the terms of the caste system, they had literally changed too much. A few of the girmitiyas who chose to return to India gained acceptance, on the argument, for instance, that the Fiji experience was like a pilgrimage, and in like fashion had involved mixing and sharing with people of castes normally

avoided. But for the great bulk it was not to be. They were not simply members of their old castes who were faced with temporary hardships. Their whole level of purity and ways of maintaining it had changed, and the British-devised labour system had indeed transformed them. In a final outcome of the "trick" behind the system, those who returned fleeing their lowest status as coolies in the colonies were usually given the status of outcastes or untouchables, the lowest status in India, on their return. Thus in this sense the rescue did not succeed, and the Fiji Indians were left to lift themselves from the reality of their "coolie" status to higher ranks in the new social universe that had recast their personal substance.

## THE ACCURACY OF THE ARGUMENTS:

## THE MOTIVES OF THE VILLAINS

We have already discussed the ways in which this account does and does not reflect the opinions and understandings of the girmitiyas as a whole. But we should also discuss the accuracy of the book in the other sense neglected earlier --its accuracy in our terms. The book puts forth economic and other statistics, and makes many generalizations about social trends and patterns. To begin an assessment of the book as a historical record in our sense, we must stress that many of these are very likely to be great exaggerations. For instance, MY 21 YEARS claims that only five out of a hundred could regularly complete their tasks, and that the average person was fined or imprisoned once a year while under the girmit. According to the Annual Reports of the Immigration Department, the total number of prosecutions against indentured labourers averaged 45% during the years of Totaram's own girmit, and in earlier years was sometimes higher still. However the total number of charges included many multiple charges against single individuals, and the total number of people charged was always significantly lower, usually about half. Thus most indentured labourers were not charged in most of the early years of Indenture, and in later years, as the Chimman Lal/McNeill report statistics demonstrate,the rates were much lower still. Using government and estate statistics, their report shows that the average male worker's earnings reflected a week of completed tasks (p.251), prosecution rates ranged between 7.4% and 11.5% of adult labourers (p.251), and the number sent to prison

was 4% or less per year (p.254). The facts revealed by these statistics are still grim, but the authors of MY 21 YEARS seem clearly to be taking a good case and exaggerating it unreliably.[1]

If statistical quotations and other generalizations might be unreliable, can we then trust the book's major claims, for instance that the British committed outrages? Any particular detail, not only in this but any text, is best verified with corroborating evidence, and thus the surest way to know is further historical research. I have undertaken a small part of this task myself, and present my results in the essay at the end of this book. However there is also another test we can apply. We should see if we can recognize, make sense of and account for the behavior of the whites as reported in this book. Two major questions are (1) why would they have been so violent, and (2) why would they have obstructed caste practices?

The Chimman Lal/McNeill Report itself provides a first answer to the first question, in its criticism of the Indenture system from a management point of view (p.27). The Indenture system gave management no leverage to motivate the workers short of threats and violence. Managers could neither fire poor workers nor, beyond basic limits, promote good ones. Rather than reaping a benefit by maximizing productivity the workers had no prospect but another "full task." Thus, in the peculiar economics of the system, there is a major gap, a need to motivate continued effort by labour. This gap was filled by violence and the threat of punishment. In this context it makes sense that police would surround the labourers disembarking at Nukulau, that overseers would beat workers and that trips to court and prison would be frequent. To understand this overseers' perception, one need only read Walter Gill's TURN NORTH-EAST AT THE TOMBSTONE,

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1. This is not to say that everything in the Chimman Lal/McNeill report is trustworthy, by any means. Indeed, while beyond the scope of this essay, a thoughtful comparison of the claims of the report to the claims of MY 21 YEARS, including its comments about the activities of the Chimman Lal/McNeill commission itself, would be very revealing of the way history is made and recorded in a colonial situation. Each reveals the untrustworthiness and biases of the other. An example of a doubtful claim in the Report: "Labourers prosecuting employers or defending themselves seem ordinarily to experience no peculiar difficulties." (p.254)

the first-hand account of an overseer in Fiji. As he makes clear, overseers felt the need to prod the workers constantly; otherwise, no work would be done. They lived in great fear of counter-violence, and above all sought to establish and defend their personal superiority and dignity, which they thought was their essential leverage in maintaining this motivation by threat when so vastly outnumbered. Totaram Sanadhya's remarkable story of his own fight with an overseer, in which he escaped punishment for his victory, fits completely with Gill's account of overseers' lives and motives: if the white man had allowed news of his defeat to spread, his diginity and superiority would be lost and his career in Fiji would be over.

What then of the suppression of caste? Charles Andrews and W.W. Pearson in their report on Indenture suggest that the atmosphere of pollution and violation in the depots contributed to making the Indians docile and more easily induced to migrate. Indeed, if it was conscious policy then depot pollution might well have created a point of no return. Andrews and Pearson cite an interview with a man in India bitterly denouncing the arkatis for taking away his wife, but making no effort to retrieve her since her life in the depot made her return unacceptable. Many of the girmitiya recollections recorded by Ali describe the birth of a no-turning-back attitude produced by the mixing in the depots. However, this kind of explanation, which make violation of caste part of a conscious recruiting trick, cannot explain the persistence of the phenomenon into the daily life in the lines, and this problem suggests that there are other causes behind it.

In fact, violation of caste need not have been a conscious policy at all. The British and the Australians, of such a different cultural background from the Indians they oversaw, are highly unlikely to have understood the significance of the rules they were forcing the Indians to trangress. Consider, for example, Totaram's own case:

> "I said to the overseer that I thought that it wasn't proper for me to stay with them [a Muslim and a Chamar]. The overseer shouted insultingly, "Go, I don't know. You have to stay there."

This overseer's answer is a kind of response that recurs continually through the text, to complaints big and small

from the Indians. The overseer, perhaps, has no interest in the substance of the complaint -- to him, the issue is one of status in his own system, the plantation culture, and the confrontation is in his mind about this entirely different hierarchy. He thus simply wants to assert his authority in what he sees as a test, and the effect on caste is an unintended consequence, but nevertheless the result of intentional action. He is not so much breaking a caste as making a coolie, but both are the historical result.

MY 21 YEARS shows what making a coolie involved, what was expected of the Indians from the depot to the lines. A final question of us then, is, why was it expected of them? Why did the British make coolies, at such effort and suffering? Why did they devise a labour system whose economics was so peculiar? To say that their reasoning about it was economic, and that they simply wanted cheap labour, is true in one sense but false in another -- true because that is certainly how they conceptualized it, false because, as Fiji history itself came to show, there was greater productivity and less overhead, thus greater profits, to be had if the Indians were given responsibility to manage their own labour, asked to sell not the sum of their labour but its products, and treated simply as "free" workers in the capitalist system. Why was this option not even understood at the time of Indenture?

The answer to this lies in the presuppositions which defined the reality the colonial Europeans saw. To pursue it to completion would carry us far beyond MY 21 YEARS but the test itself identifies its basis: a racist world view. As Lal and others point out, the British presumed quite falsely that they were recruiting mainly low caste and low class people (to them the same thing). They did not even realize fully that they were making coolies; they thought they were simply signing them up to work at a new place. And they thought that violence and strict control were necessary to make this sort of people work: people who were at heart really just animals. Animal imagery is frequent in the European decriptions of coolie behaviour -- see for instance Gill's account, and the statement of A.R. Coates, Agent General of Immigration from 1903-1914, quoted by Ahmed Ali (1980 p.10). To Coates the coolie's behaviour, when unrestrained, sprung from "latent criminal tendencies" and "mere brute animalism."

In this racist view the stereotype of caste traditions finds an important place -- Indian traditions were a rigid

mechanism of social control, providing the "restraints" on the coolies' nature which had to be replaced by legal violence when the coolies were brought away from their elders and rulers, brought overseas. In the new plantation order, then, the coolies who had been "low" in the vaguely conceived "traditonal" order deserved their own separate and lower standard of housing, income etc. Thus the laws and CSR policy could estblish one set of subsistence standards for coolies, and quite another as the basis for the stipend of the lowest ranking among planters and overseers.

Proof is not hard to find that these beliefs were absolute presuppositions of the Europeans of the time. For instance, they appear even in the arguments of those Europeans who devoted themselves to the Indians and what they perceived as the Indians' interests. Thus J.W. Burton has a horror of Indian "babus" pretending to intellectual equality with whites, and thus, even Charles Andrews believed firmly that there was a natural scientific basis to the disparity in white and black living arrangements in a colonial world. Andrews like most Europeans of his day believed that cold-climate Europeans simply required more goods, services and servants to subsist in the tropics. From these presuppositions, and from the requirements of the peculiar economics of Indenture and the British theory of dignity which organized overseers' outlooks, we can make sense of the behaviour of the whites as reported in MY 21 YEARS. Was it as bad as they make it sound? It could have been. Only further research into each particular incident or fact reported can carry this question further.

## WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

In any case regardless of the degree of accuracy or exaggeration of particular facts, MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS has much to offer its modern readers: a very accurate vision of the girmitiya point of view about these facts. Obviously, any Indo-Fijian reader more comfortable reading in English than in Hindi will find it of interest and importance. But it should also be read by Fijians, and descendants of European colonists. Fiji's multi-racialism brings the inevitable pitfall of cultural misunderstandings, and this book will provide some insight into Indian culture for non-Indians. Quite beyond this, however, it can provide help with a more important

misunderstanding.

A dangerous source of misunderstanding and antagonism in contemporary Fiji, perhaps even more important than the cultural differences, is the vast difference in the way Fiji's colonial period was experienced by Europeans, Fijians and Indians. People in Fiji are aware of the existence of cultural differences, but the gulf in historical experience is far less well understood. During Fiji's colonial period Fijians were well liked and protected by their British overlords. Scholarly points about the transformative impact of British administration, its self-interested plans and mistaken conceptions on Fijian traditional structures are well taken. But we must not overlook the fact that the ruling British attitude toward Fijians was usually one of sympathy, and that the Fijian response to this day has been great loyalty. Why weren't Indians as loyal? Why were they agitating so often, striking, calling for legal reforms, eventually for independence itself? What was their problem?

Their problem was that the ruling British attitude toward them was not one of sympathy, but expediency. Indians filled the place marked "labour" in the colonial economy. Consider the 1879 FIJI PLANTING AND COMMERCIAL DIRECTORY, in its section labelled "labour":

> There are about 120,000 natives in the group, and of these at least 20,000 would be available for agricultural work; but an experiment that the Government is trying, prevents more than a very few of these being employed. It is believed that, this experiment having proved a failure, the labour of the Fijians will shortly be available for agricultural purposes. (p.18)

This prediction was completely wrong. Gordon's "experiment" was judged a success, and his sympathy for Fijian society was maintained and enshrined as government policy. This left the "labour" slot in the colonial economy unfilled, but the 1879 Directory already knew a solution: "there is an inexhaustable supply to fall back upon from India." (p.19). Fijians were saved by Government sympathy from a typical fate of colonized peoples -- being made plantation coolies in their own country. But this salvation had a cost, and the cost was paid not by Fijians but by the Indians brought

in and made coolies in their place. Today Fijians still remember that they were more loyal than Indians were. They perceive that Indians owe them a great debt for being allowed to profit off Fijian lands. But in general they do not comprehend the great historical debt that they owe to Indians. The British Government could afford its orientation of sympathy and protection toward Fijians, and could provide them with a very atypical colonial experience, only because of the quality and efficiency of Indian labour. If the Indians had not been coolies, and cost-effective ones, in the Fijians' place, then the Colonial Government of Fiji would have been forced to compromise its sympathy with many of colonial society's expediencies -- and Fijians like so many other colonized peoples would probably have lost the land they value so greatly. Thus Indians have earned a right to their profits, and equally, a right to resent the way they were abused. Reading MY 21 YEARS can help make the Indian perception of this history clear.

Today one occasionally hears criticism of Indian complaints, notably the observation that, as Crocombe recently put it, the girmitiyas "did at least as well in the Pacific as they would have in India" (p.205). If one had been alive during the days of Indenture, one would have heard this justification more frequently, and during the last years of the system almost incessantly, as the colonial apologists tried to respond to a storm of condemnations. The argument is definitely correct if we argue by economic indicators alone. In general, the girmitiyas were better off economically. Because this is true it is not an obvious thing why Indians in Fiji and elsewhere put such emphasis on their troubles in Indenture. MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS can explain their attitude. Thus, while for modern Indo-Fijians it is a window into the past, for others it brings into focus the logic of perplexing grievances fundamental to modern Fijian history. A careful reading of this book will show that a culturally sensitive examination of the issues, and a more complex calculus of gain and loss, are required for girmit history to be properly assessed.

## OTHER READING

Listed below are the books I have cited in this Introduction, and other books worth reading about Indenture. K.L. Gillion has written the comprehensive histories of

Indians in Fiji, and Ahmed Ali's essays on topics in Indo-Fijian history also provide many insights. Brij Lal has taken some of Gillion's conclusions and proven them with new statistics. Moynaugh's history is of the sugar industry as a whole, and the report of Sannyasi and Chaturvedi is of interest for its descriptions of the problems of girmitiyas of other colonies on their return to India. First hand accounts of Fiji Indenture beyond MY 21 YEARS may be found in Gill's overseer's view, the churchmen accounts of Andrews and Burton, the official Chimman Lal and McNeill report, in Ahmed Ali's collection of interviews with girmitiyas, and in Vijay Naidu's study, which also includes interview material. The chapter on folk songs in Kanwal's survey of Hindi literature in Fiji quotes many songs, and these are also a window into girmitiya experiences and outlook. Among books in Hindi, Pandit Ram Chandra Sharma's FIJI DIGDARSHAN is particularly interesting for its descriptions of Indian religious life as he observed it in Fiji.


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# MY TWENTY - ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS

by

**Totaram Sanadhya**

I was born in 1876, in Hirangau (Firozabad), in the Sanadhya family. In 1887 my father, Pandit Revati Ram Ji, died, and my mother, my brothers Ramlal and Durgaprasad and I were left unprotected. Father left his wealth for us, about four thousand rupees worth of jewellery and so forth, but the whole of it was gone in just one year! This was because the dealers gave us very little money for it when we put the jewellery in their shops and took out loans. This way, four thousand rupees worth of jewellery was expended in just a short time. I still remember those days of poverty, and when the memory comes into my mind, the sky of my heart is covered over by gathering clouds of sorrow.

My older brother Ramlal, afflicted by these sorrows, went to Calcutta and worked as an assistant at Reilly Brothers for 8 rupees a month. My mother was greatly afflicted by poverty. From his 8 rupees a month, my brother paid his own expenses and also sent some money home. I was studying in class three at a school in Hirangau with Pandit Kalyan Prasad. My mother used to say to me "son, the way things are, you should plan for your own subsistence now." I could not see my mother's suffering, so I left home in 1893, and went off on foot for work. I had only 7 annas with me. Facing many difficulties on the way, I reached Prayag in about 16 days. From this place begins the story of my own insignificant life, a sorrowful story of Ram.

Having arrived in Prayag, I bathed on the bank of the Bhagirathi. Afterwards I met an Ahir, the son of Daragani. Hearing my whole story, this Ahir pitied me and brought me to his home. I lived with this Ahir for about two months.

For the rest of my life I will never forget the merciful things this Ahir did for me.

When I spent many days living in Tirtharaj, and never found work, I used to think that I should go, that I should return to my home. But then the thought would come to my mind that I could not bear to go home then, and see all my mother's hardships. It would not be good to be nothing but a burden on her, not giving any help at all. Sometimes the love of my mother drew me towards home, and sometimes the knowledge of my mother's suffering compelled me to the thought that I should do any kind of work, and not go home. I was thus fallen to indecision.

One day when I was in a market near Kotwali, engaged in this worrying about finances, a man I didn't know came up to me and asked, "Do you want employment?" I said "Yes." Then he said, "Good, I can get you a very good job. It's the sort of work which will make your heart joyful." To this I said, "I will work but I won't be able to work for more that six months or a year." He said, "Good! You should come. When you wish, then quit working. Nothing will happen. Come, you should visit Jagannath Ji."

My mind was not mature. On these words I came along! Deceived in this way, high class Indians come and then bear hardships for their whole lives. Oh my well-educated countrymen! Have you ever thought about these brothers? Have you ever heard about these sons of this green, bounteous motherland who have been sent to other countries by the cruelty of the people running the depots? Hearing the story of these people won't you feel the lice crawling on your ear?

This arkati[1] fooled me and brought me to his house. Once there I saw about 100 men sitting in one line and about 60 women in another. Some people were cooking with damp wood and getting tired blowing and blowing on the stove-fire.

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1. Because these "arkatis" or recruiters are important (and infamous) characters in Indo-Fijian history, and are known by this name, we have chosen not to translate this word. Similarly, "girmit," the name given to the agreement to serve a term of indentured labour, will not be translated, not even back to "agreement," the English word from which it derives.

The arkati sat me at one side. Seeing these women, I thought, these men are going off to do work, but where are these poor women going? At that time, the arkati completely forbade making conversation with these women. No one could go outside from there and no one from outside could come in. The arkati said to me, "You should cook some rice here, I'll give you some rice right away." I said, "I don't know how to cook rice. I'll eat with these Brahmans who are cooking."

The arkati explained things to the people there: "Look, brothers, the place where you will work you will never have to suffer any sorrows. There will never be any kind of problems there. You will eat a lot of bananas and a stomach-full of sugar cane, and play flutes in relaxation."

After three days the arkati began to prepare us all to be brought before the magistrate. Altogether there were 165 men and women. We all were closed into cars, and arrived at the court-house in a half-hour. The arkati had said to us before, that when the magistrate asked us any question we should say "yes." If we didn't do this then we would be charged and thrown into jail. Everyone was brought one by one before the magistrate. He asked each one, "Tell me. Have you agreed to go to Fiji?" The magistrate did not tell each person where Fiji was, what work they would have to do there, or what punishment they would be given on not doing the work. This magistrate registered 165 people in some twenty minutes. From this the reader can estimate how the magistrate wanted to free himself from the work. Why else would he do it so quickly?

Going from here we were all loaded onto rail cars. We could not talk to people sitting in the cars or to people outside. If someone wanted to talk to himself it was allowed. Yes, I forgot to say that this was a special train and we went straight to Havra, stopping nowhere in between. From Havra station we were all put in closed cars and taken to the depot. Here the immigration officer stood us all in a line and said, "You are going to Fiji. You will get 12 annas a day there, and you will have to do field work for five years. If you return from there after five years then you will pay your fare yourself, and if you return after ten years then the government will give you your fare. You will be able to get many rupees from there. Not only 12 annas. You will be able to earn much more above this. You will live with great bliss there. What is Fiji? It is heaven!"

He spoke a great deal of this kind of slippery talk. We illiterate people were already somewhat misled, and this officer fooled us completely. The immigration officer also asked us, "Do any of you not have your money or valuables with you?" The arkati standing behind this sahab gestured with his hand to us all, for us not to say anything, that he would give us our things right away. But when the sahab left, this arkati also left. Again who gives and who takes? Very many people's things, clothes, money and so forth stayed with this arkati!

When the officer was explaining things to us, a doubt was born in my heart. I thought, five years is a lot of time, not knowing what kind of hard work I would have to go to Fiji and do, or if, unable to work, what kind of blow I would suffer. Thinking this, I said, "I don't want to go to Fiji. I have never done field labour. Look at my hands. They can never do field work. I won't go to Fiji." Hearing this the officer gave me over to two Bengali elders [1], and said to them, "Explain things to this one and fix it up." To them also I made the denial, and said, "My brother is here in Calcutta in some building. Let me meet with him. Then we'll see what happens." But who listens? The door keeper stayed with me all the time. When I would not agree after their explanation, I was locked into a room. For one day and one night I was in that room, hungry and thirsty. Helpless in the end, I was forced to say that I agreed to go to Fiji. There were none of my own people there who I could tell about this incident of suffering.

When I was brought from the cell I saw that Chamar, Koli, Brahman and so forth were all seated in one place and forced to have their meal together. Just about everyone was forced to have their meal on re-used plates, and was forced to drink water. When anyone said anything, then what but he was beaten specially. Seeing this situation I said, "I will not eat with these people even if I die of hunger." The officer said, "Die. No one fears that. We'll throw you in the river." In the end I was ordered to eat with the cook.

The good clothes that we had were all taken on the pretext that they would be washed, and a sweeper [a low caste

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1. "Elder" or babu, is a title which can refer widely, to senior men of high rank, especially merchants. It can be a caste title, or it can simply mean "gentleman."

man] took us to the place on the river for bathing. We were all given soap. Many poor innocent people thought that, as we had come from far away, we were getting barfi [a sweet] for breakfast. People thinking this was barfi ate it, and then began to go, "Hare Ram! Hare Ram! Ptu, ptu, ptu." Look at the sort of simple, innocent people the arkati tricked and brought. These poor people thought that soap was barfi! Do our religious teachers, who make people supporters of dharma, and spend their time in the cities giving speeches on stages, do they ever pity also the ranks of our country people? Does anyone ever understand their duty to come to the villages and give speeches on the subject of salvation? New religious teachers are always arising in the city, but no benefits of this kind of teaching reach poor rural people, and from this they think that the soap is barfi.

THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION -- When two or three days remained before the boarding of the ship, we all had medical examinations. A male doctor gave men's and women's examinations. After that, we were given prisoners' shirts, caps, and pants to wear. For water we were given a tin jar, for food a tin plate, and for keeping our things a small sack.

THE STORY OF THE SHIP -- Then our names were called out and we were all brought abroad the ship. At that time five hundred Indians left their motherland and went to Fiji in the manner of prisoners and servants. Who knew that arriving there we would be forced to endure countless hardships? Many people wept in love for their mother, father, brother, sister and so forth. There was no one there who had heard the story of these sorrows. People who live in piles of filth, and who understand "Eat drink and be merry" as their object in life, what can they know about the affairs of these poor five hundred Indians? People are able to give attention to their country, when they make "The lives of good people are for the sake of others" their standard mantra. [1]

For each one among us a space of one and a half feet wide and six feet long was given. How much space can be enough for one person, you can decide for yourself. Some people complained that "I cannot live in this much space,"

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1. A mantra, a Sanskrit verse, often from the Vedas, is both a slogan to live by, and a prayer offered daily. See the first note in the Introduction for a discussion of this verse.

and the white doctor, shouting, said, "Son of a bitch, you have to stay here." When we sat we were given four biscuits and one-sixteenth of a pound of sugar. White people call these biscuits "dog biscuits" and feed them to dogs. Oh dear god! Are we Indians equal to dogs? What should be asked about these biscuits? They were so soft that they were broken by fists, and soaked in water, then eaten.

At about four o'clock the ship left. Our final farewell for our motherland was then. At six o'clock the sun set. At eight o'clock that night we slept. At dawn, the watchmen woke us up. We saw nothing but our ship going onward, making waves in the ocean. In the four directions there was nothing to be seen but blue sky. At that time many emotions were born in our hearts. In just the way a free bird is imprisoned in a cage, we were all locked in.

In the morning an officer of the ship assigned some people from among us to do the cooking, and some for the watch and some for 'topas.' People were asked who will do the topas work. Our simple brothers did not know what 'topas' meant. Therefore many people had their names written on the list to do the topas work. When the ship's officer said to the topas people, "you people do your work," they said, "What should we do?" Then they were ordered to clean up the latrines. Many people refused! But they were beaten up and by force caused to pick up the filth. Throughout the ship words of refusal began to echo. Will our educated population pay attention to the cry of these suffering brothers? Our brothers would by force carry human filth on a ship and we would sit silently. Isn't this a thing of shame for us?

We each got bottles of water to drink twice each day. We didn't get more even if dying of thirst. The same was true about eating. Fish was cooked and rice was cooked. Many people suffered from sea-sickness. Some unfortunates vomited and vomited and then left this world forever. Those people were thrown into the ocean!

In this way, our ship reached Fiji in three months and twelve days, stopping at Singapore, Borneo and so forth. Here will be written something about Fiji.

# THE FIJI ISLANDS

The Fiji island group is located in the South Pacific Ocean. To its west are the New Hebrides. It is found to the south of the equator at 15 to 22 degrees of longitude and 175 to 177 degrees lattitude. Counting all among them there are 254 islands. Among these people live on about eighty. The land mass of the Fiji Islands is 7435 square miles. According to the 1911 census, the population of Fiji is 139,541. Among these islands two are biggest, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Apart from these, Kadavu and Taveuni are the biggest islands. Their land is very fertile, and the islands look very green, especially to the east. There are many mountains here, whose peaks are thousands of feet high.

On the shores of the oceans there are many coconut trees. Yams, sweet potato (kumala) and oranges are prevalent here. Before, there were very few animals here. But more recently many animals have arrived. Quite a few cows, bulls, horses, goats, wild pigs and so forth are found. Among birds, pigeons, parrots, ducks and so forth are generally found in the warm places. In 1866 many Europeans from Australia and New Zealand began to come and live in Fiji. In 1874, the population of the islands came into the hands of the British government, and Fiji came to be called a colony in the British Empire. Fiji's capital is Suva, which is situated on the southern coast of Viti Levu. In the pages ahead I will write extensively on the subject of Fiji.

## ASSIGNMENT TO DIFFERENT ESTATES

One island in Fiji is named Nukulau. Here also there is a depot. We who are called 'coolies' disembarked here. As soon as our ship arrived there, the police came and surrounded us, so that we couldn't run away from there. We were treated worse than their servants there. People say that slavery has been ended in all civilized countries. When you listen this sounds good but in reality, it is certainly false. Do you understand less of this coolie system than of slavery systems? In the Empire of this justice-minded British government, the system continues. This is such a sad thing! Are there no unbiased Englishmen like Burke and Bradley living in England today?

After a short time a doctor came, and examined all of us. Everyone's clothes were gathered together in a tank and boiled. The Agent General had already given permission to the plantation men to take their coolies from Nukulau depot. Before this the planters paid a fee to the Immigration Department of 210 rupees for each person. Following the order of the Agent General, those people came to Nukulau depot. There a small coolie agent divided us, to be sent to different estates. Then the agent called us, and said to each of us, "For five years from today you are a servant of this particular sahab." I said, "I am not a servant! I am not sold! My father and brothers have not received anything from anyone, and did not sell me! I also have not received anything from anyone!" When I argued, two white soldiers pushed me and made me climb into the boat. In this way people were assigned to the different estates.

## CONDITIONS ON THE ESTATES

At the estate, we get small rooms to live in. Each room is twelve feet long and eight feet wide. If a man is together with his wife then they are given this room, and otherwise, three men or three women stay in one room. For show, this law was made: "Employers of Indian Labourers must provide at their own expense suitable dwellings for immigrants. The style and dimension of these buildings are fixed by regulations." Readers, this twelve foot long, eight foot wide room is a proper living place for the staying, rising sitting, sleeping, and cooking of three people. God should not let anyone live in such a nice building! Among the three men who get this room, perhaps some are Hindus and Muslims, or perhaps Chamar or Koli [very low castes] or whoever it could be. If a Brahman falls to the company of a Chamar or Koli, etc., then what need you ask of their troubles! And it is usually arranged this way, that Brahmans have to live with Chamars.

THE TROUBLES OF THE FIRST SIX MONTHS -- For the first six months, provisions are provided by the estate, and for this two shillings and four pence are cut from each week's pay. Provisions are at the rate of ten chatank [one-sixteenth of a seer, i.e. roughly one eighth of a pound] sharps, two chatank cow peas, and one-half a chatank of ghee [clarified butter] per day, but provisions for the week are given all on one day. For us, who take up large shovels and do hard labour for ten hours a day, how could two and three quarters pounds of sharps a day be enough? We ate our provisions for the whole week in four to four and one-half days, and the remaining days became the monthly fasting day, or else sharps and dal were borrowed from Indians who had been there longer, and we filled our stomachs with that.

## OUTRAGES [atyâchâr] AGAINST THE KABULI PATHANS

One time an arkati fooled sixty Kabuli Pathans [1] and sent them to Fiji. The depot people told these people that they as a group would get big jobs. These people were very vigorous, and because they wanted to find work as a group they agreed to go to Fiji. But when they arrived in Fiji they had to do the work of coolies. They got the same amount of supplies as everyone else, or, two and three-quarters pounds of sharps and half a pound of dal for the week, given on one day. These people ate one week's supplies in four and one-half days, and then sat. When they were called to do their work they said, "Bring food, then we will do work." At this the police were notified. Then what, but constables and inspectors came right away. The whites of the estate told them, "Look sahab, these sixty bad coolies are threatening to loot and kill us." Then the Kabulis said, "We only want to eat. We won't work without eating, and we did not say anything." The police went back, and the Kabulis did not go to work. Then the white planters said for the Kabulis to go back to work. The Kabulis again gave no answer. The whites again called the police. This time the police fired a gun at the empty-handed Kabulis and threatened them. The Kabulis said, "We are dying of hunger, and you are firing a gun at us." At this the police again went back. Injured Kabulis were sent to the hospital.

Right after this, the Kabulis were told to go to the Nukulau depot, where good arrangements would be made for their eating and drinking, living and work. They agreed to this, and everyone was brought to Nukulau depot. They were given rice etc. for cooking, and they began to prepare the food. The white Immigration Department officer there hid five hundred Fijians in the jungle. Just when the Kabulis wanted to take their first bite, a whistle was blown. In a minute the five hundred Fijians broke on these weaponless Kabulis, caught them all and brought them onto dinghies, divided them and sent them to different plantations.

This was the justice and bravery of the Immigration Department. Many newspapers spoke out against this, but

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1. This means Pathans from Kabul, now capital of Afganistan.

who is paying attention?

## HARD LABOUR

Everyone is made to get up at four o'clock, at early dawn, every day. Everyone prepares their own roti, and has to arrive in the fields by five o'clock. Women with children bring their children to the fields. Almost every person is given a lane of cane 1200 to 1300 feet long and six feet wide to weed with a hoe. This is called a "full task." The doctor usually writes that a person should be given a full task. These doctor sahabs, who get breathless and begin to wipe their faces with handkerchiefs from walking only thirty or forty chains, make the poor hungry people do hard labour. But this much work cannot be done by one of these labourers. Then what? Immediately the next day he is summoned, and his case is submitted in the courthouse before the magistrate. The magistrate asks, "Why didn't you do the full task on so and so date?" He replies, "The work is so much that I cannot do it." Hearing this the magistrate says, "My question is not, 'was the work beyond your strength?' My question is, 'on so and so date, did you do the full task or not?' Whatever question I ask, you should answer 'yes' or 'no.' Don't say anything more." The poor labourer, helpless, has to say, "Yes sir,[1] I was not able to do the whole task." Then what? He is pleading guilty. The magistrate fines him ten shillings to one pound. In this way ten to twenty days of these poor people's wages are lost in fines. They get monthly wages of one pound, two shillings after doing the full task. But for each hundred, no more than five people can do the full task. And even these people cannot do the full task continuously for five to six months. In my twenty-one years of experience, I did not find anyone among 40,000 Indians who had completed his full task continuously for five years. The average person is not able to earn more than seven and one-half rupees per month. What else should be said about this? Fiji is twice as fertile

1. Sanadhya writes that the labourer says "Han Sarkar" literally, "yes o government."

as India, but hundreds are dying of hunger! So many people, even while doing such hard labour, have to live with a half-filled stomach.

THE OUTRAGES [atyâchâr] OF THE OVERSEERS -- Overseers commit outrages against us whenever they like. Many of our brothers there make a noose and hang themselves, from fear of hard work, and from fears of jail, and the blows of overseers. Not many days ago several Madrasis at a plantation in Navua hanged themselves for this reason. The cause of their deaths can be known from the death records there. Although a coolie inspector is appointed by the Immigration Department to investigate our living conditions in each district, these white inspectors never make clear our true situation. These great men are drinking brandy at the homes of the planters all the time. When can they try to stop the suffering of us poor Indians?

When the overseers are angry with any people, they punish them. The ones being punished are made to do very hard work, separate from all the others. Overseers go to where these people are alone, and beat them severely. These poor people do not complain, because they are afraid, thinking, "I will have to work for five years under the supremacy of this sahab." If anyone does complain, then because there is no witness the case is dismissed. I have seen many incidents when a brother or other close relative is not able to give evidence, from fear of an overseer.

On the excuse of punishment, overseers commit outrages against many of our sisters. For example, it would not be inappropriate to write here the story of the Chamar woman named Kunti.

THE OUTRAGES [atyâchâr] AGAINST KUNTI -- The arkatis fooled Kunti and her husband at Lakhuapur district, Gorakhpur, and sent them to Fiji. These people had to suffer great difficulties there. At that time Kunti was twenty years old. With great difficulty Kunti was able to protect her virtue[1] for four years. Then a sardar and an overseer began

1. This 'virtue' is her satitva, the total devotion of a wife to her husband, which was in ancient times the basis of the custom of sati. Thus it is much more than a simple notion of propriety or chastity. The power which the story of Kunti had for the girmitiyas suggests a great respect for this kind of virtue, despite what one reads concerning the breakdown of marriage morality among them. See the appended essay on "Fiji Indians and the Law, 1912."

a great effort to destroy her virtue. On 10 April, 1912, at the banana plantation called Sabukere, the overseer gave Kunti the task of cutting grass, at a place apart from all the other men and women, where no witnesses could be found and no one could hear her crying. The sardar and the overseer went there to rape her. On the threat of the overseer, the sardar tried to grab Kunti's arm. Kunti freed her arm, ran and jumped into the nearby river. By god's will, the dinghy of a boy named Jaidev was nearby. Kunti was saved from drowning. Jaidev pulled her into his dinghy and took her across the river. When Kunti told the white plantation owner about this incident, he replied, "Go away. I don't want to hear about field things." Afterwards, Kunti did not go to work through the 13 April. On the 14 April she was given the task of weeding twenty chains of grass, and her husband was given a task one mile away. Also, Kunti's husband was beaten so much that the poor man was half dead. Kunti had someone write about the incident in a newspaper and it was published in BHARAT MITRA. The government of India noticed this account, and an investigation of this incident was made in Fiji. An immigration officer arrived there and threatened Kunti. But Kunti said that what she had published in BHARAT MITRA was completely right. No matter how much we here praise the courage and fortitude of Kunti, it is not enough. She jumped into a river and protected her virtue, and even when she was dependent on the immigration officer, she rebuked him.

Having listened to the story of Kunti, will not our brothers make an effort to stop this coolie-system?

NARAYANI -- A woman by this name worked in Nadi district at Navo plantation. A child was born to her who died. Two or three days after she had given birth, an overseer said that she should go to work, even though, according to the government law, a woman is not able to go to work for three months after giving birth to a child. But why should a white overseer attend to these rules? Narayani said, "My child is dead. I will not go to work." At this the overseer beat her so much that she became unconscious and fell. A white police subinspector came, investigated and had the woman brought to the hospital. The overseer was arrested. The case reached the Supreme Court in Suva city. When this woman came off a steamer into Suva, there was not enough strength in her to take even one step by herself. Therefore she was carried to the courthouse on a stretcher. At the end of the case the white overseer was found not guilty and was freed. This poor woman was beaten so much that her mind

went bad, and until now she has stayed crazy. What a striking example of justice this is! The glory of purity is eternal! Many outrages of this kind are happening there all the time. The overseers know well how to beat the Indians with the kicks of their shoes, and know how to break teeth at their roots with a fist. They burn clothing, kick away food, and give us troubles at will. These are all inner sufferings. Going to court is useless without evidence. One time in 1912, I was sitting in Nadi courthouse, and saw a case going on in a magistrate's court there. A Madrasi made a complaint against a white doctor, superintendent of the Navakai Company hospital. His presentation was like this: 'I was sent to the hospital because I was disturbed by pain in my arm, and not able to work at the plantation. Day and night I was disturbed by the pain in my arm. The hospital sardar gave me two buckets and told me to fill the water tank with water from the well. I answered "I am helpless from pain in my arm. I am not able to fill the water tank. If I was capable of working I would be at the plantation. Why come to the hospital?" Hearing this the sardar hit me without pity, I shouted, and then the doctor-sahab came in and asked what was going on. The sardar said, "This man is not listening to my orders. He is not filling the water tank." I said to the doctor, "My arm hurts. You know this. Because of the pain in my arm, I cannot lift even an empty bucket, so how will I pick up a bucket full of water?" This devilish doctor also kicked me and hit me with his fists. My teeth were broken by the blows of their fists, and blood flowed from my nose onto my shirt. I became unconscious and fell. While I was unconscious I was lifted up, carried and locked in the toilet room. This incident happened at four o'clock in the afternoon. When I came awake, I found myself locked in the toilet. I broke off a piece of wood from the place where the containers of filth are kept. By this route I got out of the room. Running, I came to the sardar. The sardar sent me to the district doctor. From fear of the doctor no one will give evidence. The doctor has threatened the witnesses who have come here."

The magistrate heard this presentation and called for witnesses. But they turned out to be against the Madrasi. The doctor's lawyer argued many points. Because his case was not very strong, the Madrasi lost. The doctor sahab won. In the decision, the doctor was found not guilty. The doctor applied to the magistrate for his expenses. The merciful magistrate said, "When this man came to me his face was swollen like a football from his injuries. On top of this you want your expenses returned! You won't get your

expenses." Then the doctor went away.

The Madrasi was taken by his boss overseer, and brought back to work. The name of this Madrasi was Ram Das.

## DISGUST FOR BLACK PEOPLE

Because of our black colour, we have to endure many hardships on steamers. First of all, we are given very bad places to sit. We are not allowed to go towards the rooms of the Europeans. Even if we are prepared to pay the full fare, we still do not get a good place to sit. One time I went from Suva to Lautoka on the steamer named the "Adi Kepa" I was made to sit where pigs and other animals are kept. For many reasons, a fever came over me. Rain began to fall during the night, and I had only one blanket. My clothes were all soaked, and I was shivering from cold. I asked many times to be given a room. I offered to give the whole fare for that, but no one listened. I had to stay there, helplessly, and got soaked.

The treatment I received is not given only to uneducated or less-educated Indians. It is also given to important well-educated Indians. In many ports, third-class whites disembark casually, and the clothes of second-class Indians, their socks, pajamas and so forth, are all taken and disinfected.

In Fiji there is one big company called "C.S.R." which is in the sugar business. They buy all our sugar cane. A man whose sugar cane goes to them is given a receipt. Once a week, the cane growers are given money for these receipts. When the company officer takes these receipts from our hands, he first takes the receipt with iron tongs from far away, and then puts it through the smoke of a burning sulfur fire. When they are asked why they are doing this, they say, "You are black people. I'm afraid of getting sick from the receipts which you have touched with your hands. Therefore we keep the germs on the receipts far away."

One time I went with my friend to the office of an English lawyer. An Indian was there writing something.

The barrister sahab told his wife, "Cover your mouth and nose with a hanky. Otherwise you will get sick from the air coming out of the mouth of this black man." Although this man was standing very far from the mem sahab, still the white barrister said this! Readers! This is a barrister who makes thousands of pounds every year from our brothers.

We are not allowed to come onto the veranda of the company offices. If by mistake we go, we are shoved off. We have to suffer many of the aforementioned sorts of sorrows every day because of our black color. We people, who consider ourselves subjects of the British Empire, are treated like this when we have left our homes in India. Then we open our eyes.

## OUTRAGES [atyâchâr] OF THE MERCHANTS

The British merchants of Fiji never care about the welfare of the Indians. First of all, many of our Indian brothers, just when they have done their five years of hard labour, go to heaven. Then, European merchants put many obstacles in the way of those who by the mercy of god become free after five years of hard work, and wish to work in the fields. For sugar cane, the produce of white planters is bought at the rate of fourteen shillings a ton, but even if our produce is better than the produce of the whites, it is not bought for more than nine shillings a ton! Many Indians in Fiji are banana planters. A lot of bananas are sent to Australia from there [Fiji]. We are not able to go to Australia and do banana business. European merchants buy boxes of bananas from us for two or three shillings a box, and then sell them in Australia for fourteen shillings a box. Sacks of maize which they won't give more than ten shillings for, they sell themselves for eighteen shillings. We have to give up and sell our produce to them. If we don't sell, then what can we do?

## TWO HUNDRED INDIANS WERE CHEATED!

Banner sahab is an old planter in Fiji. [Biner?] He took eight hundred acres of land on lease. The land was overgrown with jungle. The sahab thought, "If I have this jungle cleared at my own expense, the cost won't be less than one thousand pounds. If the work can be done by somehow deceiving some simple Indians, that would be good."

Thinking this way he called about two hundred Indians and said, "I have eight hundred acres of land. People can get from me however much land they need. Clear this land and plant it." With this sort of slippery-slidey talk he distributed all the land among the Indians and wrote on each piece of paper: "Use this land for five or ten years and pay at the rate of one pound per acre."

These poor people with great effort and with their money, paid the pounds, cut the jungle, cleared the brush, and planted the fields for one year. At the beginning of the second year, Banner sahab threw them all out from there and stole the land. The poor people argued a great deal, but it was all useless.

I could go on giving many example of this kind, but from lack of space they are not written. Readers! From the rule of rice in the kettle [1] you can infer about this also.

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1. The rule of "rice in the kettle" is one of the principles for sound inference developed in the Nyâya system of logic. The Nyâya, a school of philosophy seeking knowledge of the world by means of inference, (anumâna) was one of the six great schools of classical Indian philosophy, along with Vaiseshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mîmâmsâ and Vedânta. Nyâya principles for inference are labelled and known by their paradigmatic illustrative examples. The rule of "rice in the kettle" is the principle that one can know the nature of any homogenous whole by examining any one of its parts. Thus, when cooking, one can know whether all of the rice is completely cooked by tasting only one or two grains.

Reference to this rule suggests that the writer, or at least the editor, of this book was a man of some classical Sanskritic education, and reference to it in this cryptic form suggests that the readers also were presumed to be so educated. For a discussion of the audience for whom this book was written please see the Introduction.

# FIJI'S MARRIAGE LAWS

It is the responsibility of a man in Fiji to go to marriage court and have the name of his wife registered. When a marriage has been made, the husband and wife both have to go before the magistrate. The magistrate asks for their agreement, and then gives them a certificate, which is called a marriage certificate. They have to pay a registry fee of five shillings. A marriage which is performed according to religious rites is not considered good, according to Fiji government law, without being registered. If any Indian arrives in Fiji together with his married wife, and does not register their marriage, then his wife cannot receive his wealth after his death. That wealth is sent to the Immigration Office. The wealth of men who are without any heirs is also sent to the Immigration Department. The Immigration Department sends this wealth to India. But the arkatis who fooled and sent over these people often had their names, castes, and addresses written completely falsely. The money is sent from the Immigration Department to these addresses. When the address is not found, then the money is sent back to Fiji. Because of this wickedness of the arkatis, the mother, father, brothers and other relatives of a dead man do not receive his wealth.

Can we hope that the government of India will stop this kind of injustice? The Indians dwelling in Fiji are writing and investigating on the subject of Fiji's marriage and kinship laws, but up to now there has been no result.

## WHITE BARRISTERS AND LAWYERS [1]

White lawyers and barristers take ten guineas for one guinea's work, whenever an Indian visits them. Many barristers have practiced fraud against us up to the present. They could take whatever they like as their earnings, and then not even go to court! Some white lawyers first take a few pounds, then on the night before the presentation of the lawsuit, send word that, "If you bring five more guineas, then we will fight your case, and otherwise not." The poor man cannot hire another barrister at night, and therefore being helpless, has to pay the five guineas. If the lawyer is told, "Return my money," then they say, "We cannot return your money."

Indian cases are dismissed when white barristers don't come at the right time. If there is any conflict between an Indian and a white person there, then usually the white barrister will take money from the Indian to fight his case, and then in trial take the side of the white. Then the whites win! Our brothers, who worked at hard labour for ten hours a day and earned so little for it, are cheated by the fraudulence of white barristers. The poor Indians cannot make a complaint for their rupees about this, because the white barristers will not accept a case against their own white brothers.

1. See the appended essay on "Fiji Indians and the Law, 1912."

## WHITE BARRISTER DIGESTED 1,925 POUNDS

In Suva, Fiji's capital, there was a barrister named Berkeley. One day forty-five Punjabi Sikhs went to him and said, "We would like to go to the Argentine Republic in South America. We have heard that we will get many jobs there. But no steamer goes to South America from Fiji. What shall we do? How shall we go?" The white barrister thought to himself, "These people are trapped in my good claws." Then he said to the Sikhs, "If each one among you would give me four pounds bail money, five pounds for my earnings, and sixteen pounds for the fare, then I can get a steamer ready and send you straight to Argentina." The Sikhs fell for this, and gave twenty-five pounds each according to the barrister's instructions. He gave them each a receipt for only sixteen pounds. In this way the barrister took 1,925 pounds from them, and then put all of his wealth into the name of his son.

The Punjabis complained to the Supreme Court. They spent scores of pounds and then received a decree. But now what did the barrister have? Not a penny was gained back. The poor men wept. Many became penniless, and one Sikh died from his suffering!

# THE CALLING OF A BARRISTER FROM INDIA

When we had been forced to suffer so many hardships, we thought that things would be better if an Indian barrister would come to Fiji. White lawyers were writing one thing and telling us something else. They had little sympathy for us, and they looked on us with disgust. Therefore we had to make an effort to get an Indian barrister to come and live here. We had been reading in the newspapers for years about the honourable Mr. Gandhi, and knew something about his benevolent deeds. Therefore we called a meeting. The chairman of this meeting was Shriyut Rupram Ji. It was decided unanimously that we should send a letter to Mr. Gandhi, a brief account of our troubles, in which we would beseech Gandhi Ji to make an arrangement to send a barrister to Fiji. The task of writing the letter was entrusted to me, and according to my own insignificant intellect I wrote the letter. The gist of the letter was this: "We in Fiji are having many problems with white barristers. These white men are committing many types of outrages against us, and are eating hundreds of our pounds (£). There is a very big need for an Indian barrister here. You sir are a renowned patriot. Therefore we hope that having pity on us you will make arrangements to send an Indian barrister here. In this foreign country, there is no support for us except for you." Mr. Gandhi, sympathizing with us, published in a newspaper a translation quoting part of my letter, and sent a letter to me. Here is the text of the letter:

Shravan Vadi 8, 1967[1907?]

I received your letter. Hearing the sad story of Hindustani brothers there I am sorrowful. There is no chance of sending a barrister from here. No one suitable to send is available.

You should send to me whatever news you wish. I will send word of it into other countries.

I think always about the difficulties of the steamer. For all those things there [i.e. in Fiji] there should be a nationally minded man, well-read in English. If one comes to my mind I will send him.

I will wait for your next letter.

Yours Sincerely,

Mohandas Karamchandra Gandhi

The Gandhi Ji who devoted his entire life for his brothers, who, having left the income of 4000 pounds yearly, worked even as a coolie for the purpose of ending the sorrows of the Indians, and also went to jail many times for his countrymen, this very Mr. Gandhi wrote the letter above. In this letter also, a glimpse is seen of the great soul of Gandhi Ji and his whole devotion to his country. That a great man like Gandhi Ji wrote this letter in Hindi is a thing greatly honoring Hindi. From this letter Hindi nationalism is very clear.

Shri Manilal Ji, M.A., L-L.B., barrister-at-law, read the article published in "Indian Opinion" by Gandhi Ji. In those days he was working in Mauritius. Mr. Manilal was a renowned patriot of India, and he took part in [Indian National] Congress for many years. It is useless to introduce Manilal Ji before the educated brothers of my country in this insignificant book. He has done much in Mauritius. He stopped the coolies from going there, and he gave much help to the Indians who had gone there. Making changes in the law, he saved Hindus and Muslims from troublesome French laws. Before in Mauritius, the hair and beards of our brothers in prison were cut off, and there was also much disorder about eating and drinking. Mr. Manilal completely stopped all of these things; this was his work.

Mr. Manilal read the aformentioned article by Gandhi and exchanged letters with us. In Fiji we collected 172 pounds for Manilal. From this 45 pounds was sent for his steamer fare, and from the rest, law books were bought, and arrangements were made for a house and so forth for his living. But after some days a letter in Hindi came from Manilal Ji, in which he wrote that "My people are not giving me their permission to come to Fiji. I am going to Natal. I will get Ganhdi Ji's opinion there, and then write to you. If I am not able to come then I will return your money." When we received Manilal's letter, our hopes began to fade away. Again a meeting was held. By the order of everyone, I sent another letter to Gandhi Ji. In the meantime Manilal Ji reached Natal. Gandhi Ji said this to Manilal Ji: whatever you have promised, it is proper for you to do. Manilal Ji agreed to come to Fiji. The great Gandhi Ji with kindness sent us a letter. This letter was written as follows:

"I have received your letter. I had sent a telegram to Mr. Manilal Doctor. [1] You did not send his reply. From all of this I understood that you people had not agreed to release him. For the sake of everyone else Manilal decided to go to Fiji. He has already left Cape [Camp?] Bhai, Natal, last Friday, and I sent you a wire. He will arrive there by way of Australia. [2]

"It is my hope that all of you will now be agreed and will conduct yourselves towards Mr. Manilal in a good manner. People there should make arrangements for his living and eating immediately. All brothers will be excited that Mr. Manilal Ji will surely be there permanently.

"When more should be written then please write.

"Sincerely,

"Mohandas Gandhi."

On the 27 of August, 1912, Manilal arrived in Suva, the capital of Fiji. We made preparations for welcoming him to the best of our abilities. On the day he was welcomed, there was so much happiness for the Fiji-dwelling Indians that it cannot be told. Hundreds of Indians were gathered there. That day hundreds of my brothers came from other places by steamer. Fiji's original inhabitants were happy that day. On the face of many Indians drops of sweat glistened, from hard work and running around. Oh! That

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1. "Doctor" may have been Manilal's family name. In a Fiji Times interview shortly after his arrival in Fiji, Manilal is quoted as saying that his father was a doctor, and that it was customary for sons to inherit their father's titles. Manilal signed letters to Indian newspapers as "Manilal Doctor" and was often mistakenly referred to as "Dr. Manilal." This matter is discussed in K.L. Gillion's Fiji's Indian Migrants.

2. The text of this letter is confusing. Gandhi's admonition to "you people" seems to address the people of Mauritius who were resisting Manilal's departure for Fiji. Perhaps this entire first paragraph is copied by Gandhi from a letter he sent to the people of Mauritius. However, the rest of the letter is clearly addressing the Indians of Fiji.

sight was so beautiful! There wasn't even space on the street for a sesame seed, men pressed together filling it. A couple of Fiji-British newspaper reporters were wandering from one place to another, excited. They had no idea what was happening. Manilal Ji disembarked and waited in a bungalow. Later, in the evening, he was given a welcoming letter from the Fiji-dwelling Indians. In this letter he was beseeched to improve the fallen condition of our brothers, and help us with kindness. Manilal Ji gave a small speech and in it he said, "To the best of my ability, I will surely try to help you." It was an exceedingly joyous thing that Manilal Ji was intent on following his promise completely.

Three days after this, the Fijian people also welcomed Manilal with great ceremony. They invited Manilal Ji, and some six or seven hundred Fijians gathered. Fijian men and women danced and sang to welcome him. Fijians have a custom of honoring a person for whom they have the most love and for whom there is very much respect, by having the daughter of the highest chief of the locality place a garland, by hand, around his neck. Manilal was made to wear a great abundance of these garlands. We were amazed to see the zeal of the Fijians. Many Fijians in their own language were saying:

"It is a very joyful thing for us today that we had an opportunity through our friend Pandit Totaram to welcome such a well-educated Indian. Until today no Indian so well-educated had come here among those dwelling in Fiji. Here there is a great need for educated people like you, and may God make you and your brothers live long. You should think of us as your brothers."

Right after this Mr. Manilal also made a beautiful speech. Mr. Sam Mustapha translated the Fijian into English and explained it to Mr. Manilal. Then after leaving there in the evening we had dinner at my home. In the morning they went to meet Mahajan Algu near Durululu [Naduruloulou] station. On their arrival, with great happiness he put up a fire [fireworks?] with powder-balls. Hearing the noise, the magistrate gave an order to stop, or else face a summons. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon Manilal left for Suva, riding in Babu Ram Singh's launch.

# THE FIJI ISLANDS

HISTORY OF FIJI -- I know very little about the ancient history of Fiji. Even after doing some research on this subject nothing certain is known. The reason for this is that before the coming of the missionaries the Fijians did not know how to read and write. It is the belief of historical researchers that these people came from New Guinea and dwelled here, but this belief is groundless. On this subject, no trustworthy proof can be found up to now. Yes, between Polynesian language and Fiji language there is found a small similarity, but up to now there is no proof concerning when and how Polynesian people came to Fiji. In 1643, a Dutchman named Tasman discovered Fiji. Just as I have already written, in 1876 this island came into the hands of the British government. The island of Rotuma was included in 1879.

POPULATION -- From the census of the second of April, 1911, it is known that the population of Fiji is 139,541.

| Race | Men | Women | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Europeans and other whites | 2403 | 1304 | 3707 |
| Half-caste and half-white | 1217 | 1841 | 2401 |
| Indians | 26073 | 14213 | 40286 |
| Polynesians | 2429 | 329 | 2758 |
| Fiji's original inhabitants | 46110 | 40986 | 89096 |
| Chinese | 276 | 29 | 305 |
| Rotuman | 1043 | 1133 | 2176 |
| Mixed | 457 | 355 | 812 |
| | 80008 | 59533 | 139541 |

CLIMATE -- Fiji's weather is very good. In countries near the equator climate this good is not found anywhere else. In Fiji malaria is absent! Apart from this, there is no sign of many other types of fever and disease. The wind which blows from the southeast cools down Fiji. Cholera and plague never spread in Fiji. There are many mosquitos, but in Fiji malaria is not spread by them. Lions, tigers, snakes, scorpions and so forth are not found in Fiji at all. But there are many flies in Fiji, so many that because of them it is hard to breathe. In Suva, capital of Fiji, about 107 inches of rain fall each year. In Fiji there is no fear of drought because some rain falls every month. But storms are large and forceful here, causing great destruction in the fields. For banana plantations these storms are particularly destructive.

## FIJI'S ORIGINAL INHABITANTS

Before, the people dwelling in Fiji had their own customs. But since Fiji came under British authority, there has been much change. Offspring were prevalent among these people before, but now they are destroyed by degrees.

Some 250 years ago the custom among these people was that when a Fijian had become very old, then Fijian youths would get together, go to him and say, "Ko iko sega ni via biu na vura-vura" or, "Don't you want to leave this world?" When he gave no reply, then they roasted him and ate him.

The wedding customs which were prevalent before among these people were also unique. A Fijian of one village went, caused a girl of another village to run away with him, and came back to his home. Then the people of the girl's village would assault that man. On the boy's side also there were many men ready to fight. Between the two sides there was a big fight. If the man's side wins, then the wedding of the girl to the man is made, and if the girl's side wins then the girl returns to her own village and she is married to someone else.

Before, the Fijian women were buried alive together with their husband's corpse. When someone's friend died

then he would cut off the little finger of his own left hand and bury it with him.

But now these bad customs have become very rare, because the majority of Fijians have become Christians. Their marriage custom also does not exist now. Girls choose their own husbands. Their mother and father do not interfere in this business of theirs. Among Fijians there are no marriages with the girls under 16 and the man under 25 years old. Even the custom of burying the finger is now stopped, but then secretly some men cut off and bury their finger! I see so many men this way whose fingers have been cut off. From the cutting off of their finger and burying it with their dead friend or brother, these people "mate vata" or, meet death together with them, compelled by love for the friend. How well these Fijians show their love on the death of a friend!

Fijian people, whether or not they transact their every-day affairs in foreign clothes, always make use of handmade things when there is any festival at their own place. We people, who on the occasion of a marriage spend so much in buying hundreds of rupees of foreign clothes, ought to accept this lesson from the Fijians. When a child is born among Fijians, then Fijian women stay awake for three nights and at night specially light the house in the manner of Dipawali. When Fiji was first discovered, these people were so ignorant that they were giving away 50 acres of land for one packet of matches. But now they are very intelligent. The majority have become Christians. In each village there is a Christian school for them, where Fijian language is taught. All are meat-eaters. Bow and arrow and spear, these are their weapons. They are expert in fist-fighting. They even kill pigs with their hands.

THE GIRMIT OF FIJIANS -- The outrages done to our brothers and sisters have already been described. But these outrages do not fall on Fijians. First of all, Fijians do not work under binding contracts. Then if they are doing work on girmit then they have servants write in many conditions for their benefit. When any Fijian works on girmit then he would first have it written that he is to be given three meals a day, clothing after six months, and soap, cigarettes, kerosene, blankets, and so forth. Until this thing is written and registered no Fijian will ever agree to work.

In COLONY OF FIJI a European wrote an essay with the

following purport: "Fiji's true inhabitants cannot do the work of a labourer well. Their own nature is wholly unsuited to this activity. In the cane fields, one has to do the very same work every day. (They get fed up from doing this.) But the Indian coolies are utterly well-suited for this very activity, and planters generally give the work to them."

Very well! Who will keep as servants Fiji's true residents? First of all, to them as servants the expenses are very high, and then, the whites cannot commit outrages against them. This is the coolie from India -- you punch him with a fist, hit him, kick him, you don't give him wages, send him to prison, and no one hears about it at all!

An unprejudiced writer has to be like this: The Fijians are not suited to this activity. Why? Because their own nature is unsuitable for this activity!

Now you should compare a Fijian and an Indian labourer. We people get five shillings and sixpence there, if we complete the work. There were never more than five men per hundred who could complete the work. But now we have to see how much an uncommonly hard-working Indian coolie, bearing all kinds of outrages, can earn. At the rate of five shilling six pence every week, there is one pound two shillings a month, and thirteen pounds four shillings a year. From this nine pounds is expended on dry food. At the rate of one seer of sharps and a quarter seer of dal, this comes to 9 man [one man = 40 seers] sharps and 2¼ man dal. In Fiji, sharps is 4 annas a seer, dal 6 annas a seer. Spices, turmeric, chilis and so forth are 12 annas a pound [roughly half a seer]. In this way, as little as 9 pounds are expended in eating. And it isn't a big thing to be fined one or two pounds in a year, or else to be in jail for ten to twenty days, a completely ordinary thing. From this you take away one more pound. Counting it all in this way it comes to eleven and a half pounds, and as little as one and a half pounds would be left for other expenses. Still on this, clothing etc., oil, wood, festivals and so forth are all left. More than one pound can never be saved. But Fijians save all nine pounds because their food, drink, clothing, oil, and soap are all the planter's responsibility, and for the whole year nine pounds are left.

Fijians investigate, have contract conditions written for all types of comforts, and then register. In our place, arkatis having misled them, take them to the magistrate. The magistrate asks, "Are you agreed to go to Fiji?" As

soon as the word "yes" leaves the lips, the registry is done. What would be the registry? From saying only "yes," there was five years of black water. [1]

FIJIAN LANGUAGE -- Before, there was no written language here. But since the Christians have arrived, people there read and write their words in Roman letters. Fijian people's names are also very strange, such as Maciu, Iyobi, Lepani, Savenaca, Ratu Eroni, Jo and so forth. Listen to some words in the Fijian Language: [2]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| tenana | = | mother |
| temana | = | father |
| tokana | = | older brother |
| tacina | = | younger brother |
| watina | = | wife |
| kalou | = | god |

[correct Fijian noun forms: tina, tama, tuaka, taci, wati, kalou.]

## AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF THE INDIANS DWELLING IN FIJI

There are more than forty thousand Indians in Fiji. Among these are thirty-five percent women and fifty-five percent men. When travelling around I asked Indian women about coming to Fiji. Some women said, "The arkati fooled my poor husband, and I had to come along with my husband."

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1. Kâlâ pânî or black water can refer to a prison term on the Andaman Islands (in the Indian Ocean), from India, or to exile more generally. According to some shastras, crossing black water is inherently polluting and causes loss of caste status.

2. All the kin terms cited here are in the third person, i.e. "his/her mother," "his/her father" etc. When Fiji Indians speak Fijian they often use the third person forms for all purposes. Whenever the form Sanadhya writes in Devanagari is accurate, it has been transliterated into standard Fijian orthography. We have also tried to transliterate his mistakes.

Many women said, "My father-in-law, mother-in-law, husband and so forth died, and the close kin did not help at all. For this reason I went on a pilgrimage tour, and from that the arkati fooled me and brought me." Some women also said, "When I became a widow on the death of my husband, the people of the house began to argue and fight with me, and to give me troubles. Because of these troubles I left home. On my way, unluckily I was caught up in the trap of the arkatis. In the end I was forced to come here to bear unending troubles."

From these words above, it it clear that from arguments and fights with close relatives, and from improper treatment together with widowhood, many women were forced to go to the islands and suffer many difficulties. These women are completely simple and generally uneducated; for this reason they are swiftly caught in the arkati's traps. From investigation it is known that among the five hundred women in Rewa and Navua, only three or four could read and write. Even though men are also forced to suffer many difficulties in Fiji, women are forced to bear more sorrows than the men. First of all they have to get up at half past three in the morning and cook some roti. After that for ten hours they have to do hard labour in the fields, and then having gone back to the house, make more roti. When women return from work, there is a corpse-like shading to their faces. One is so sad to see the dirtiness of their faces at that time, that it is indescribable. These women who had never been out of their village in India, who didn't know that there was a country outside of their district, who are soft and tender by nature, who never did hard work at home, these women today, having gone thousands of miles away, in Fiji, Jamaica, Cuba, Honduras, Guyana and so forth have to do hard labour for ten hours a day. Many child widows were misled and sent to Fiji. Listening to their sorrowful stories, the hardest heart could melt. When they tell the story of their own sorrow, head down, tears flowing, it is impossible for the listener to stop the tears from his own eyes.

The suffering our sisters are forced to bear there because of the white overseers is indescribable. Seeing the troubles of the Indian women, Fijians would say in their own language, "Sa ca vakalevu na vada [vanua?] idia, sa qai lako mai na yalewa vulagi mai Viti sa tiko ca i ke sa butuka veisiga veisiga na ovasia sa ca na kai idia na marama sa lako mai Viti vulagi kevaka dua tamata sa na kitaka vata na yalewa keitou vaka matea sara ko koya." This means, "India is a bad country, whose women come to a foreign country,

Fiji, to do the work of labourers. Coming here, they suffer many outrages. If the outrages which are done to your women were done to our women, then we would destroy to the roots the ones responsible."

Aren't the words of the Fijians literally true? Isn't this a thing of shame for us that our sisters, mothers and daughters across seven seas should suffer these outrages? Isn't there even a particle of self-pride and self-protection in us? When we used to praise our country before Fijians, they used to say this right away. "Your country is not worth anything. Watch out. Don't ever praise your worthless labourer's country before us again." When Fijians said this, we had to be silent, without an answer.

FEARS ABOUT CASTE IN RETURNING TO INDIA [1] -- Many men and women, after completing their girmit, and living in Fiji for five more years, want to return to their motherland. But they don't return, because of this thought: "when we arrive no one will have us join into their caste. We will be forced to suffer many caste-insults there. Therefore until death we are forced to bear these troubles." My countrymen drop from the caste their brothers who have made ocean journeys and then returned from the islands. They give them so many troubles that with sadness they return to the islands. Some of their wealth, which they earned penny by penny with great difficulty, going to the foreign country and suffering assaults, disgraces, and hunger, is taken by close relatives. Then, selfish family priests (purohit) casually cause some of the wealth to be expended in ceremonies of atonement. I give this example for my countrymen. Near my house in the Fiji Islands lived a Kanyakubja Brahman by the name of Guljari. From great efforts in eight years he collected about 300 rupees. Knowing him as a Brahman, at every month's full moon they gave him sîdhâ.[2] In India he had lived in Kannauj. From his home there his brother sent a letter, in which he wrote, "You must come back. If you don't come back this year, it will be as if you killed one hundred and one cows." When Guljari Lal saw

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1. The fate of caste in the Indenture system is discussed further in the Introduction.

2. Sîdhâ is an offering of uncooked food, grains, sharps, potato, rice, sugar, and so forth, given only to Brahmans. Thus, these offerings are proof that the Fiji Indians regarded him as such. Sîdhâ is still given to Brahmans in Fiji today.

his brother's letter, thinking of his duty (dharma) as a Brahman, he went to the homeland [i.e. India]. At the time he left, people gave him more donations (dakshiNâ).

When he came to his home, he was put to stay in someone else's house. He entrusted his brother with all his money. Some days later the family pandit (purohit) was called. This respected man came bringing with him a book of law. All of the older people of the village sat together. An opinion was formed about the sea journey. Guljari described his eating and drinking on the ship from his leaving home to his arrival in Fiji. In judgement the whole journey was called a pilgrimage. He was told to listen to the Bhagavad Gita. [1] People of five or six villages were told about the feast. The cost was decided at some seven or eight hundred rupees.

To pay for this, Guljari asked his brother for the money he had given him. His brother gave a blunt answer: the people of the caste outcasted him. The village people began to hate him. His brother became his biting enemy. He said, "You have hidden some rupees from us. Spend those. We will not give you these rupees." Helpless Guljari sent a letter with his story of troubles to his close friends in Fiji, and wrote, "Save me as you save a cow from a butcher's hands, and be a sharer in virtue." They collected and sent from there seven hundred rupees. Then Guljari reached Fiji in April 1914.

This is how many people returned to Fiji, and in going, became Christians and Muslims. Convicted of the crime of the ocean journey, many of our brothers said a last farewell for our mother country, and went away. Having gone there [to Fiji] saying "Jay" to Sanatan Dharm, they follow the rules of the Messiah. [2] Readers! Just think: Do you read

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1. This recital takes several days. By declaring the journey a pilgrimage, the transgressions of eating and drinking rules and the impact of crossing black water are lessened, as great lattitude in such things is allowed when one travels for religious purpose, and visits holy sites, an essentially purifying activity.

2. "Saying 'Jay' to Sanatan Dharm" means saying the prayers, which can end with a communal shout of "Jay" or "victory," of orthodox Hinduism. The Messiah is Jesus Christ, the rules of the Messiah, Christianity.

the Ramayan? Do you grasp the teachings of the love of India? Do you know to love your brother? I ask this modest question of the directors of the great Indian religious organizations: Have you thought of a plan for these foreign-dwelling brothers? What instruction do you give them? Should these people take part in cow sacrifices or in Christianity? Or will you encourage them, and embrace them?

May I ask the speech-giving religious people of our country, what is the harm in mixing these people into the castes again? Oppressed by outrages of the home, fooled by the wicked arkatis, sent to a foriegn country, what are the defects in this of these helpless people?

STATE OF EDUCATION -- In Fiji there are missionary schools, but to send children to study in this kind of school is to make them Christian. Therefore it is necessary for some man, who is literate in Hindi and also knows English, to go from India and open a school to make our brothers educated. Some of our brothers there are able to read the newspaper. This is a good thing. Very many newspapers and newsletters are sent there from India, such as: SARASVATI, CITTRAMAYJAGAT, MARYADA, BHASKAR, BHARAT MITRA, ABHYUDAY, ARYA MITRA, BHARAT-SUDASHAPRAVARTAK, VIBHARAT, VENKATESHWAR, and so forth. The men who can read, read aloud these newspapers from motherland India for their uneducated brothers. The Indians there read BHARAT MITRA with great eagerness, and in reality, BHARAT MITRA has done a lot for the Fiji dwellers. It is hoped that our other newspapers will follow BHARAT MITRA, and do some writing for the aid of our foreign-dwelling brothers.

STATE OF RELIGION -- First of all, the pandits and moulvis who went to Fiji are not themselves at all educated. Secondly, their aim is to swindle money from their innocent brothers, and then return to their home! These sort of selfish people cannot help our brothers dwelling in Fiji at all.

One day we sent a letter of request to the governor of Fiji with this purport: it would be of great benefit if they could send a good religious instructor from India to Fiji. The Immigration Department would pay his travel expenses, and we would arrange for food and so forth. This proposal was accepted by the Governor and it came to India. But the unfortunate thing is that no one agreed to go from here. It is the duty of the great organizations for Indian religion to send a good religious instructor to Fiji, for

An Indian Methodist Church congregation, circa 1910.

the liberation from sorrow of the Fiji-dwelling Indians. But how can those who understand sea-journey as a great sin go there for this purpose? An Arya Samaji gentleman by the name of Ram **Manoharanand** Sarasvati went and he preached there, therefore these words of thanks. There is a very great need for this sort of religious instructor there, who knows Vedic principles and knows English as well. To teach about religion is a very difficult thing. For this one has to suffer hundreds of difficulties, and in this activity, there is need for great courage, spiritual power, physical capability, patience and endurance. We know that quite a burden is put on the Arya Samaj, and that the Arya Samaj is doing a lot of work, but aren't these givers of aid to the world, the Arya Samaj, able to send one more religious instructor to Fiji, for the benefit of our foreign-dwelling brothers? It is our complete hope that the Hindus of Fiji will help the teachers sent from here to the best of their ability.

We have also made arrangements to perform the drama of Ram Lila in a few places there every year. Right now Ram Lila is celebrated every year in several places including Labasa, Navua, Lautoka and so forth. From this the benefit is that in the hearts of our brothers, love is made for their own religious festivals.

The Christians have been doing their work in Fiji continuously for many years. But even from this large effort, they have made very few Hindu Christians. The reason for this is that we have continuously tried to keep our brothers from becoming Christian. And if they become Christian, then we convert them [shuddh karnâ, literally, purify them]. In Fiji there are many Kabir Panthi, Ramanandi, Satnami, Gusain, and so forth, many types of sadhus. They all go around making their disciples. Very many sadhus have been fooled and sent to Fiji. Having worked their five year girmit these people became free, and then began to ask for alms. Their whole work is to travel around one or two times a year to their disciples. For this reason we are saying that the arrival of a good religious instructor to Fiji would be a great benefit.

For several years the women have begun to remarry in Fiji. It is true that first of all, the number of men in Fiji was double the number of women, and secondly, there are many young widows, who were fooled and sent to Fiji. In such a situation, unchastity was natural. In Fiji there are many crimes committed of the sort in which a man killed his wife because of misconduct and then hanged himself.

An Indian Mission School in Fiji, circa 1910.

In this there is no blame for anyone. The real blame is for the "Indenture System," the coolie system. The Fiji Indian community, living in such an evil and corrupted condition, was not greatly spoiled. This thing is truly amazing. When the Fiji-dwellers saw that secretly there was a lot of adultery going on, they considered it best that the custom of remarriage should start.

Remarriage is or is not approved in shastra [traditional law]; I have no authority to speak on this subject. But I surely cannot go on without saying this much, that remarriage has helped a great deal in stopping crime in Fiji.

STATE OF MATERIAL LIFE -- The material state of the Indians dwelling in Fiji is bad. Becoming free after five years, quite a few men do their own planting, but except for rice planting, there is no possibility for profit. Because of the high cost of food, some people are dying of starvation. If rice was not planted many more people would begin to starve. Out of a hundred one or two men have their own business. We have said before that for doing the whole task the labourer gets one shilling. But the work completers are five out of a hundred, because there isn't any fixed limit for work, such that the work of a field twenty chains long and six feet wide is called a whole task. If any person does this hard work in one day, then the next day's full task becomes twenty-five chains long and six feet wide. The average person not able to earn more than twelve shillings or nine rupees in a month. In Fiji we buy at these rates: for one shilling, six pounds of wheat flour, four pounds of rice, or four pounds of cow peas. The gist is that in comparison to India, the expenses there [in Fiji] are double. Some people's idea is that going to these islands one could earn a lot of money, but this notion is erroneous. I think that among those hundreds of men who returned to India from these islands, there are a couple who surely earn and bring money. But now we have to say, Look! Certain people went there as a coolie and brought from there so much wealth. I don't think five men out of a hundred gain wealth there. So what is the big deal? The ninety five return poor and starving. And if the men who gained wealth there are asked, they generally say that if they had stayed in India and worked that hard, then they could have earned neither more nor less than in Fiji. All right, the significance is that the mistaken conception, that by going to these islands men become immensely rich, should be taken from the hearts of people and especially the hearts of village people.

STATE OF HEALTH -- The state of health of ninety percent of those working under girmit is miserable. If a girmit labourer gets sick, then he is sent to the planter's hospital. But those who have released themselves from girmit work, and become free, have to suffer many troubles in this respect. If a free person wants to go to the government hospital there, then he has to go to the Immigration Office. Only when the office workers there have first taken a deposit of ten rupees do they write a letter for going to the hospital. If there are no rupees, they will take jewels. Those who do not have anything with them beforehand are not sent to the hospital, or else, if with mercy they are sent, then afterwards they have to pay it all. The fee is eight annas a day.

It would be good if some doctors and physicians [1] from India would go and open their own dispensary there! The state of health of the free people is ordinary.

ORGANIZATION-STRENGTH -- It is my pleasure to write here that among our Indian brothers dwelling in Fiji, for three or four years a germ of organization-strength has been produced. If one wanted to collect a donation then with hard work it could be done. In Suva alone we collected and sent eighteen pounds for our brothers dwelling in South Africa. From all of Fiji, forty pounds or 600 rupees were collected and sent. We also formed an organization called the British Indian Organization, which is continuing to do its work to the present. Its president is Mr. Manilal, barrister. Its secretary is Babu Ram Singh. Mr Ram Manoharanand Sarasvati with great labour collected one hundred and forty pounds and erected the Sarasvati school in Taibau village. Mr Ram Manoharanand Sarasvati went to Fiji at his own expense. When this great man was in Brahmadesh, someone from Fiji sent him a letter. In this way for a year there was an exchange of correspondence. After that, one month after arriving in Fiji on 6 January, 1913, he began his roaming. It is a delightful thing that Swami Ji has resolved to make educated the descendents of the uneducated Fiji-dwelling Indians. Making a speech at Samakala Sthan, Swami said that "The rest of my life is for the deliverance of the descendents of the Fiji-dwelling Indian brothers." May God fulfil his promise.

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1. "Physicians" or vaidya are practictioners of the Indian Ayurvedic medical science.

It is a pleasure that the Muslims of Fiji are mixed with the Hindus. They never sacrifice cows on Bakra'Eid. In the work of collecting donations and so forth they come forward and take part. This much mixing among uneducated people like us is no ordinary thing.

## THE OPINION OF SOME UNBIASED PEOPLE ON THE SUBJECT OF THE FIJI-DWELLING INDIANS

In Suva, capital of Fiji, there is a missionary named Miss H. Dudley. She is an Australian Methodist, and she has a great deal of sympathy for the Indians of Fiji. She sent a letter to the newspaper INDIA showing the grief of the condition of the Indians. That letter was quoted in MODERN REVIEW. For the readers, I am taking the letter from MODERN REVIEW and writing it here.

THE WRITER IS MISS DUDLEY, SUVA, FIJI

Sir,

Living in a country where the system called, "Indentured labour" is in vogue, one is continually oppressed in spirit by the fraud, injustice, and inhumanity of which fellow creatures are the victims.

Fifteen years ago I came to Fiji to do mission work among the Indian people here. I had previously lived in India for five years. Knowing the natural timidity of Indian village people and knowing also that they had no knowledge of any country beyond their own immediate district, it was a matter of great wonder to me as to how these people could have been induced to come thousands of miles from their own country to Fiji. The women were pleased to see me as I had lived in India and could talk with them of their own country. They would tell me of their troubles and how they had been entrapped by the recruiter or his agents. I will cite a few cases.

One woman told me she had quarrelled with her husband and in anger ran away from her mother-in-law's house to go to her mother's. A man on the road

questioned her, and said he would show her the way. He took her to a depot for Indentured labour. Another women said her husband went to work at another place. He sent word to his wife to follow him. On her way a man said he knew her husband and that he would take her to him. This woman was taken to a depot. She said that one day she saw her husband passing and cried out to him but was silenced. An Indian girl, was asked by a neighbour to go and see the Muharram festival. Whilst there she was prevailed upon to go to a depot. Another woman told me that she was going to a bathing ghat and was misled by a woman to a depot.

When in the depot these women were told that they can not go till they pay for food they have had and for other expenses, they were unable to do so. They arrive in this country timid, fearful women not knowing where they are to be sent. They are alloted to plantations like so many dumb animals. If they do not perform satisfactorily the work given to them, they are punished by being struck or fined, or they are even sent to gaol. The life on the plantations alters their demeanour and even their very faces. Some look crushed and broken-hearted, others sullen, others hard and evil. I shall never forget the first time I saw "indentured" women. They were returning from their day's work. The look on those women's faces haunts me.

It is probably known to you that only about 33 women are brought out to Fiji to every one hundred men. I can not go into details concerning this system of legalized prostitution. To give you some idea of the result, it will be sufficient to say that every few months some Indian man murders for unfaithfulness of the woman whom he regards as his wife.

It makes one burn with indignation to think of the helpless little children born under the revolting condition of the "indentured labour" system. I adopted two little girls -- daughters of two unfortunate women who had been murdered. One was a sweet, graceful child so good and true. It is always a marvel to me how such a fair jewel could have come out of such loathsome environments. I took her with me to India some years ago, and there she died of tuberculosis. Her fair form was laid to rest on a hill side facing snow-capped Kinchin-chinga. The other child is still with me -- now grown up to be a loyal, true and pure girl. But what of the children -- what of the girls -- who are left to be brought up in such pollution?

After five years of slavery, after five years of

Two Indian Women

legalised immorality -- the people are "free". And what kind of a community emerges after five years of such a life? Could it be a moral and self-respecting one? Yet some argue in favour of this worse than barbarous system, that the free Indians are better off financially than they would be in their own country! I would ask you at what cost to the Indian people? What have their women forfeited? What is the heritage of their children?

And for what is all this suffering and wrong against humanity? To gain profits -- pounds, shillings and pence for sugar companies and planters and others interested.

I beseech of you not to be satisfied with any reforms to the system of indentured labour. I beg of you not to cease to use your influence against this iniquitous system till it be utterly abolished. -- H. Dudley, Suva, Fiji, November 4.

[In English in original text]

Commenting on this, the editor of INDIA wrote this on the subject of Miss Dudley:

> Miss Dudley, the writer of this pathetic letter, is the pioneer Indian missionary in Fiji. She is an Australian Methodist and has done admirable and devoted service in undertaking the care of Indian orphan-girls whose mothers have been murdered and their father hanged as the result of sexual jealousy produced by the scarcity of women, which is one of the many blots upon the system of indentured labour.

There is no need to make comments on this letter from Miss Dudley. I don't understand why our government does not stop the going of these labourers to Fiji.

In Fiji J.W. Burton is a famous Christian. He is a great unbiased writer. He came sometimes to my house in Fiji. I don't know how the faith was born in him that I was going to become a Christian! One time he even told me to become Christian, I remember this well. I answered, "Padre sahab, on what falacy are you trapped? I'm not one to become a Christian. With your argument you should make a Christian

of this boy who works in my house." The Padre began to discuss this with the boy. The boy asked such skillful things that the Padre was astonished. The Padre has written a book, mentioning this boy, saying that there is so much intelligent reasoning among even the young Indian children, that it is very difficult to preach the Christian religion among them.

Let it be so. This Burton sahab wrote a book called THE FIJI OF TO-DAY. In this book he examined the real conditions in Fiji. Even if we don't agree with all of Burton's opinions, we cannot go on without praising his spiritual strength. To write the truth and also for this the unpleasant truth, great spiritual strength is necessary, and reading THE FIJI OF TO-DAY we can know that Burton is very courageous. Against those planters, from fear of whom our government shrinks from ending the Indenture system, Burton has written the true story. For example, I will quote a few things from the aforementioned book.

Burton writes about the inhuman outrages of the white man:

> The Young and brutal overseers on sugar estates (of Australian and New Zealand origin) take all sorts of liberties with good looking Indian women and torture them and their husbands in cases of refusal. Sometimes compounders of medicine will call an Indian woman into a closed room pretending to examine her, though she may protest there is nothing the matter with her) and then torture her most indecently for the gratification of their lust and even for getting her to swear a charge against some Indian who may have incurred their displeasure. Women are known to have been fastened in a row to trees and then flogged in the presence of their little children.

These outrages are done to helpless women, and the wealthy and educated men of our country are still found saying this: "Oh! The Indian population has grown a lot. Therefore it is necessary that many men and women go to different countries and islands and reside there, where there is need for labour and where they can live happily." Our humble request to these educated people (if we can call them educated) is, just open your eyes and think about the aforementioned outrages.

Like Miss Dudley, Burton sahab also wrote about the shortage of women. Burton sahab's story is that the shortage of women here is the biggest evil of all in the condition of the Indians. The cause of all this is the coolie system. For every hundred men thirty-three women are brought here. The result of this is that crimes of violence, abduction, adultery and so forth are commonly seen in the courts. In every sitting of the court, two or three criminals would be brought who had killed their wives because they had accompanied other men. If opinion is made based on the laws of the community, the root of the evil is the Indenture System. About a dozen Indians are hung in this way every year.

On the subject of magistrates Burton sahab has written very well. Here I am giving a short summary of his detailed account. There are very few magistrates in Fiji who have studied law. They are white and they know how to read and write a little. That is enough to be a magistrate, and commonly in many places the magistrates do the doctor's work too. In a place called Tavinni [Taveuni?], a single man is magistrate, District Medical Officer, local doctor, police inspector, jail superintendant, wharf master, road supervisor, and captain of his own small ship.

Do you see, readers, how all-powerful the government of Fiji has made its officers? To keep hoping that such all-powerful people will keep to their duty is useless.

According to Burton sahab, the arrangements for police in Fiji are not good, and more policemen are needed. First, Fiji has a very small population, and next, the police station and the court house are stationed about twenty miles apart.

> The Inspector of Indian coolies only pays two visits a year to their miserable barracks where men and **women** are penned together like cattle and even these inspectors are for the most part not very keen about the grievances of Indians, as some of them are ex-employees of the C.S.R. Co. (Colonial Sugar Refining Company) which is the real king of the colony.

What kind of life do the Indians lead on the estates? Burton sahab writes about this:

> The difference is small between the state he now finds himself in, and absolute slavery.... The coolies themselves, for the most part frankly

call it 'Narak' (hell)! Not only are the wages low, the tasks hard, and the food scant, but it is an entirely different life from that to which they have been accustomed, and they chafe, especially at first, to the bondage....No effort is made either by the Government or by the Employers to provide the coolie with any elevating influences ....A Company of course has no soul. So long as its labour is maintained in sufficient health to do its tasks, no more is required. The same may be said of its mules and bullocks. The children are allowed to run wild. No educational privileges are given. As soon as they reach the age of twelve they too must go to the fields.

[this is from pp.271-3 of FIJI OF TO-DAY]

This account of Burton sahab is true word for word. The Fiji government does nothing for our progress. Why should we complain to the Fiji government? Our government lets us be snared in the traps of arkatis, and for the happiness of just a few planters, pays no attention to the sentiments and opinions of we 300 million Indians!

Burton sahab at one place writes about field labour:

The system of 'tasks' prevails on the estates. so many chains of sugar-cane weeding or planting counted, for example, a 'task'. For the satisfactory performance of this amount of work the coolie receives one shilling. He is expected to accomplish it in one day, and the basis is that of an average man's ability. The women are placed on the same footing; but their tasks are lighter and the payment proportionately less. If a man fails to perform the task set him within one day, he is liable to be summoned to the court and may be fined or imprisoned for his slothfulness....When the coolie judges that the task is too hard he has the right of appeal to the coolie inspector (a Government official); but as that gentleman is not seen oftener than once or twice a year, it is a somewhat limited privilege. Of course there is the magistrate to whom complaint can be made; but the court-house may be twenty or thirty miles away, and that is practically an impossible distance. It is not surprising, therefore, that

> under such conditions it frequently happens that the coolie takes the law into his own hands,and tries the edge of his cane-knife upon the skullof the English oversee.
>
> [pp.269-70, FIJI OF TO-DAY]

Burton sahab writes very accurately, because when you surround an animal, and there is no way of escape for him, then he will think "hit, kill," and after all a man is a man. The coolie inspector come a few times a year, but even then he does not hear our complaints. How can one go to the magistrate's court? The company does not give leaves, and remember that to run away and complain without taking a leave is to send yourself to jail. Again, how can we make a complaint? What kind of complaint can be made about those at whose place one certainly has to work for five years? Today we complain, tomorrow they will kick us with shoes, and give us more difficult work, write a shilling in the register and give us six pence. This is the consequence of our complaints.

According to Burton sahab, in 1907 out of 11,689 coolies, there were charges against 1,461 that they did their work lazily. They were fined or sent to jail. Burton sahab comes forward and writes,

> Probably an even greater proportion of dissatisfaction did not make its appearence before the bench.
>
> [p.270, FIJI OF TO-DAY]

The meaning here is that they were beaten up and forced to do work. Burton sahab writes:

> One of the saddest and most depressing sights a man can behold, if he have any soul at all, is a 'coolie line' in Fiji.
>
> [p.274, FIJI OF TO-DAY]

Burton sahab calls the Indian coolies "Human agricultural instruments," and this is also right. The planters think this about the coolies and do business.

Burton has written that among those working in the fields are many who have some education, who are of high caste and who are decent. They were fooled by the arkatis from India, who said that "In a few days after arriving in Fiji you will

become rich." From these slick words they came to believe, and then when they arrived in Fiji they had to do the hardest manual labour, had to eat the kicks of the overseers, and so forth.

Yes, sometimes the wicked arkati tricked educated people even. In Ara district, an arkati fooled a boy who had studied up to entrance exam. When he arrived in Fiji, he too was told to work in the fields. Somehow, he worked in the field for some days. After a while he sent a letter to me. In it was written, "I will hang myself and kill myself, or else you must make a plan to save me. I cannot do this hard work." According to my insignificant intellect, I sent a letter saying, "Send a letter to your father, and have him make a case before the Immigration Office. If your father will give your fare to the Immigration Office then perhaps by the grace of God you will be released." He did this. After a great effort he was released from servitude. When he arrived in India I took him with me.

Burton sahab has written much more about the troubles of the Indians. Sometime later I will describe it all, because my intention is to translate and publish THE FIJI OF TO-DAY. But it will be good to give here a few among these things.

(1) In Fiji, all the animals are numbered by hot iron for recognition. It is necessary to say that this outrage is committed on cows also. Indeed this thing saddens us Hindus.

(2) In Navua, some free Indians were selling by the storehouse on the riverbank, carting their goods on large boats. They had been doing business this way for fifteen or twenty years. Then in 1913 a white man opened a store in Navua. But his goods sold less well than those of the boat people. He talked to the manager and caused all the boats to be moved. These poor people helplessly moved the boats and lost their business!

(3) In Mauritius, to where the going of coolies has been stopped, there is a right to vote to elect the members of the Legislative Council for Indians, but in Fiji this right does not exist. There are elections in Fiji in which the Indians have the right to vote to choose members of Municipal Council. But now the white people in Fiji are thinking of snatching away even this insignificant right. They want to submit a bill for an English test as a

qualification for voting.

If the government of Fiji accepts this, it would be in fact a very great injustice.

There isn't even a single school in which this test of learning in English could be given. Will the Indians come out from the womb reading English?

(4) The Indians who grow sugar cane have to sell it at the value which the company sets, because there are no other buyers. If Indians want to send bananas to Australia or New Zealand then a white broker has to do it for them. This broker keeps the majority of the profit for himself.

(5) There is no Indian in Fiji so rich that he could import things directly from Calcutta and Bombay in his own name. Therefore European companies import the things. These companies take whatever profit they wish from the small Indian drapers and store owners.

On these subjects it is not necessary to make commentaries.

Going ahead, Burton sahab writes about the coolie system:

> The system is a barbarous one, and the best supervision can not eliminate cruelty and injustice. Such a method of engaging labour may be necessary in order to carry out the enterprises of capital, but there is something dehumanising and degrading about the whole system; it is bad for the coolie; it is not good for the Englishman.

The free Indians, who are suffering the above-mentioned troubles, are contributing so much to Fiji, it is unnecessary to discuss it. The Indians hoe and plant twenty thousand acres of land: 5580 acres of sugar cane, 2000 acres of banana, 1158 acres of maize, 9347 acres of rice, etc.

## GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION

Fiji is a colony of the British government. The governor is appointed by the British government, and then goes there.

To help the Governor there are Legislative and Executive Councils. The Governor is chairman of these Councils. On the Legislative Council are ten government officers chosen by the Governor. Two members are sent from the organization of the government of the Fijians [i.e. the Great Council of Chiefs], and six members are selected from among the general population. With the help of the Chief Justice, the Attorney General, the Native Commissioner, and the Agent General and the Receiver General of the Immigration Department, the Governor does the work of the Executive Council.

The tax assessed on things coming in from the outside is a principal source of income there. In 1911 the entire income was 240,304 pounds 14 shillings. Out of this 146,628 pounds, 6 shillings, 3 pence was the income from the tax levied on imports. Men who do business have to get licenses. Taxes are assessed also on all sorts of occupations. In 1911, the Building Tax Ordinance was passed and a tax began to be assessed on all houses. Each adult Fijian must pay a tax from 10 shillings to one pound a year. Authority over land in Fiji belongs to the Fijian people of that place. This land is given on lease. The government collects the rent money and distributes it to the Fijian landowners.

## AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

In Fiji there are three main crops -- sugar cane, banana and coconut. The land of Fiji is especially well-suited for sugar cane. On land on the river banks and ocean shore, with great efforts sugar cane grows. Six districts are best known for sugar can plantations:

| | |
|---|---|
| Rewa | in 10,000 acres sugar cane grows. |
| Ba | 14,000 |
| Lautoka | 15,000 |
| Navua | 6,000 |
| Rakiraki | 1,200 |
| Labasa | 10,500 |

The CSR Company, only, prepares sixty thousand tons

of sugar each year. In Fiji bananas also are abundant. One sort of banana has been in Fiji for hundreds of years, and in 1848, another type of banana plant was brought from China. The Chinese plant is very short in height, and hurricanes and storms cannot do any damage to it. From 1909 to 1911, 41,172 boxes of bananas were sent to Australia and 117,479 boxes to New Zealand.

In addition to these, cotton, coffee, maize, tobacco, castor oil seed, rice and so forth grow in Fiji. To make rope, pandanus also is grown in Fiji.

## THE IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT

Generally, three kinds of people do work under contract in Fiji: (1) Indians, (2) Indigenous Fijians, and (3) Polynesians. To keep Fijians in this costs more, and they do not do manual labour. Polynesians, fed up from outrages, have now stopped doing work under contract. Therefore the poor Indians, suffering hundreds of difficulties and eating blows, have to do the work of coolies. There are government immigration agents in Calcutta and Madras. They keep arkatis as their servants. These arkatis trick our decent brothers. Some wander in Mathura, with animal faces, some are acting as priests in Haridwar [a pilgrimage place], some are saying in Riyasat that "We cause coolies to get employment at twenty-two rupees a month. This work is not for our own sake, it is government work." Some, becoming bankers in Kanpur, keeping watches in their pocket, taking canes in their hands, are saying, "We will give you a job. In Calcutta a pilgrim's house (dharmshala) named Jamaica is being built. We will give nine annas daily." Some became doctors, and some wander in the disguise of a soldier to fool villagers. The significance is that these cunning arkatis, like the demon-cannibals (rakshasas) of ancient days, assuming all sorts of disguises, fool our brothers. The editor of a newspaper wrote in his editorial column that:

> In no country in the world would this state of matters be tolerated for a moment and we think the position serious.

Going farther, the editor writes:

> There is now a number of recruiting agents..who

have done all that man can do to treat the labourers as a preserve for them to plunder.

> Contractors are everywhere plundering and seizing the labourer and selling him for something like Rs. 210 or more per head, of which the poor labourer receives not even a pinch of salt. Thus the very essence of scoundrelism, an absolute trafficking in human flesh, of which the responsible Government takes no notice, is tolerated everywhere, while schemes permitting of the labourer, proceeding to the labour districts in a state, where all the comfort which he desires, are sternly suppressed.

The above account is absolutely the truth, but who listens? The labourers should not be sent to Riyasat. Why? Because by doing this it is possible that the Indians will make a profit! Trinidad, Jamaica, Cuba, Natal, Honduras, and Fiji, which are the pilgrim houses of our arkati bankers (because the arkatis have made these islands their pilgrim houses), need to have labourers sent to them!

I leave this subject now, and in the next concluding paragraph heading I will write about this in extensive form.

## THE APPOINTMENT OF A COMMISSION

In 1913 a commission was appointed by India. The government appointed two men to this commission. One was Mr McNeill sahab and the other was from Khurja, Seth Natthimal's nephew, Mr. Chimman Lal. When we heard that a commission was coming we were very pleased. They arrived in Fiji in September. Although we don't know enough to review the work of this commission right now, on this subject we should make a petition.

When the white people at the plantations learned that a commission was coming, for many days before they began to threaten our brothers. They said to Indians, "Look. A commission is coming for you. If you say one single word against me, then understand that you will be in trouble. The commission will be leaving from here is a few days, and you will have to work here for five years. Watch out! If you send a single word from your mouth, then we'll break

your mouth with our fists." What people who were frightened in this way said before the commission, you can imagine. When the commission members arrived in Lautoka, Mr. McNeill was touring, but Mr Chimman Lal stayed in Lautoka Hotel because of bad health. What happened once, but that a white overseer gave so many blows to a poor Indian man that he became half-dead. Blood began to flow from his mouth because of the blows and two of his teeth were broken. While in that condition, bringing the two teeth in his hand he went to Mr. Chimman Lal and told the whole story.

Mr. Chimman Lal gave him a letter and told him to go to the dispensary. He was going to the dispensary when, on the way, the overseer met him and threatened him severely, saying, "Wait! After four days Chimman Lal will go. Is Chimman Lal your father? I am your father for five years. When the commission goes we will take out all your heat." On this threat he came back and remained quiet.

On whatever plantation the commission went to, our brothers were questioned in front of the planters. When face to face with the oppressor it is a difficult thing to give evidence against him. The thing is made even harder when one has to do five years more work under this oppressor. The members of the commission went to Nokomodo, which is one mile from Wainiwakasi plantation. On that plantation is the Chamar woman named Kunti. It is disappointing that the commission members did not take the trouble to interview Kunti.

We petitioned by letter for the help of Chimman Lal Ji. In this letter we wrote about our troubled condition, and beseeched for reforms. This was the gist of the letter:

"Whoever is to be made an overseer should be married. It is important that these people be somewhat familiar with Indian people's customs and the Hindi language, so that they might be able to understand our sufferings etc.

"Generally the coolie inspector goes to the house of the overseer or a big sahab and drinks brandy. It is his duty to go into the fields and investigate our hardships, and try to get them prohibited. Men who have already worked as overseers should not be appointed as coolie inspectors, because there is no pity or even a bit of propriety in the hearts of the men who have worked as overseers. The coolie inspector should also be married. It should be exceedingly important for these men that they are able to speak the Hindi

language and to understand it. Every month they should go to each plantation and write a report and bring it.

"The wealth of those who came from India and died here is deposited in the government bank. We ask, in what work has the government spent it? Isn't it the duty of government to make one or two schools out of this wealth, so that it would be convenient to educate our children!

"Burton sahab has written on page 243 of his book THE FIJI OF TO-DAY: "The Company does not want Indians to be educated." Does the Company want us to remain uneducated and servants of the planters always?

"When our Indian brothers who work for the Company in their youth become old, there is no one taking care of them. These poor people die of hunger in Fiji. It is the duty of coolie agents to send these crippled helpless people to India. The expense of this should be given to the government from among the rupees deposited in the government's account of deceased Indians' wealth.

"The wages received by Indians here are very low. Then out of this the government applies a big tax on food items. For example, on dal the fee is three pounds per ton duty. Therefore, from such small wages, nothing can be done. Listen to the prices of some items over here. Sharps, 6 pounds for one shilling. Four pounds of rice for one shilling, and four pounds of dal for one shilling.

"The white men who commit rapes on the oppressed women of our country should receive very strong punishment.

"The sardar should be someone who the coolie agents wants and himself sends to the plantation. The sardar should work directly under the coolie agent, not under the overseer. The overseer offering bribes wants beautiful women from the girmitya sardar, and when he doesn't bring them, the sardar is fired. Sardars should have all their duties explained to them. Coolie agents should keep a close watch on the sardars. Burton sahab has written on p.210 of THE FIJI OF TO-DAY that an overseer told a sardar to go and bring a beautiful woman. This sardar was intelligent and well-educated, and he refused to do this. Because of this the overseer beat the sardar severely, and even brought charges against him. The helpless sardar was sent to jail for six months. The padres sent a petition about this to the judge. Then the sardar was released from prison. The wicked overseer

was sent out of the plantation.

"On plantations where there are more than fifteen small children, a nurse is kept, to look after the children when the women have gone to work. For the work of nurse, trustworthy women should be found, with Indian opinion consulted. Many deceitful nurses work as procurers.

"There are many problems for us with respect to land also. We have to give money to the Fijians. After great difficulties they make agreements. When the government wills it, we get land, and otherwise, all effort and wealth is useless. Day after day harsh laws are made for us. White people can get as much land as they want. They can buy it for as little as two or three shillings an acre. The law makers are white men who own thousands of acres of land and who don't like to give land to us Indians. When our brothers cut away the bush and make the land ready, then the land is snatched away. Those who have the government land for four to five years get a notice from the government, saying that whenever the government requires the land, the government will give six months notice and then remove them."

To our misfortune, Mr Chimman Lal fell ill, and the commission was not able to go to the estates which were located in the bush, and where the white people gave our brothers many more hardships.

Mr Chimman Lal went together with the Governor to see a festival at a Fijian school in the Davuilevu district of Rewa. There, while shaking hands, a Fijian landlord said to Chimman Lal, in his own language, "Don't you know that women of your country come to this country to work in girmit, and that upon them all sorts of outrages are committed? Don't tears of blood come from your eyes when you see these women?" It is said that Mr Chimman Lal did not know the Fijian language. I was standing behind him, and wished that some translator could have explained these words to Mr Chimman Lal, to see what answer he would give to this! Unfortunately, this didn't happen. If it was to happen, then for a sympathizing Indian, there was only one answer to that. This was to bow one's head and cry in shame.

## MY OWN RAM-STORY [1]

I have already written about the events of my arrival in Fiji. I was sent to the plantation called Nausori. There the overseer gave me a room eight feet long and eight feet wide, in which myself, a Muslim and a Chamar were told to live! I said to the overseer that I thought that it wasn't proper for me to stay with them. The overseer shouted insultingly, "Go, I don't know. You have to stay there." Afterwards I said to my companions, "Do me a favour and please go to some other room." Somehow, they agreed to go to another room that night. In the morning, we got an iron pot for three people; they call these "iron cast." To praise this pot is beyond my abilities. Think about it. That black pot showed the blackness of the coolie system. In about two hours I cleaned it and then cooked rice in it. As soon as I put the rice on the fire, the Muslim and the Chamar came bringing the overseer. They complained that the pot had not been given to them. The overseer ordered me to give the pot to those people first, and then to cook my own food. I had to give them the pot. Then I went to the home of a free Indian, borrowed a pot from him and made use of it.

In the first six months, I was eating in four days the goods which I got for the week. For the rest of the days I made use of things borrowed from the free Indians, and greeted my own hunger goddess and prayed to keep patient. But seeing the Company's rice and dal my hunger goddess would make my mouth water. I used to wash with vigor the pot of the color of the god Bhairo, [2] which shows the blackness of the coolie system. Its blackness would never go away.

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1. Here, as at the beginning of the book, Sanadhya is comparing his own story with that of Ram, the central figure of the epic Ramayan. The main point of comparison is exile, and the comparison evokes the image of perserverance through hardship. See also RAMA'S BANISHMENT, edited by Vijay Mishra, a collection of essays about Indians in Fiji published a century after girmit in Fiji began.

2. Bhairo is the god whose black flag joins as a tenth with the nine flags of the nine forms of the goddess. His name comes from "bhai" or "brother", and as the brother of the goddess Durga he is often worshipped as part of prayers to her.

In the meantime, my merciful hunger goddess, shouting at me every moment, gave me less suffering than the overseer did, and finishing off in four days the whole provision, would on the fifth day bless the Colonial Sugar Refining Co., Fiji employers, and the people who passed the Provisions Act. Sometimes the hunger goddess would lose the battle with me, those weeks dragging along I would use those supplies five days. One day I said to the manager that I should be given more supplies. The manager asked, "Well, are you a man or a horse?" I answered, "I used to be a man but this hoe has made me into a horse. This hoe has awakened my hunger goddess." The manager laughed and said, "Okay, take this letter." I took the letter to the store of the sahab who gave out food supplies. I got two pounds, or one seer, of raw rice. I came back to the manager. He said, "Cook it in front of me." I prepared the rice. In front of him, I ate three shares. The manager was surprised. From the next week on, I began to get one more seer than granted by the provisions law. Four weeks later another man said to the manager that "I also should get more provisions, I also am not getting enough to eat. Totaram has begun to get more." The manager said, "Supplies will be given according to the rules." From that day I stopped receiving extra supplies. From then on the hunger goddess began to make me suffer.

At first I was given a full task, but it was so much that I could never do it. The overseer used to harass me a lot. Whenever he came to see my work, a couple of blows were deposited on my face! One time I planned that even if I had to go to prison, I would not leave without beating this overseer.

One day this overseer, wearing coat, trousers and hat, came strolling, and just when he arrived, landed a fist on my head. In applying blows the whites are very skillful. My head was sore from that blow. I was being silent, and the overseer, why should he stop, hit me again, a double blow. This time I became angry. I put aside my hoe, and on my own I put my head between the overseer's thighs, and threw him so that he fell right down with a thump on his back. As soon as he fell I landed both my feet on his chest, and began to hit him again. I gave so many blows that two of the overseer sahab's teeth split, blood began to flow from his mouth, and his skin was torn. Reader! It should not be thought that I did this thing with bravery. I had a fear that if he got up then I would be killed, and the killing for him would be no big thing, because afterwards he would be judged not guilty and released. Thus, because

of this fear a fourfold zeal came to me. The sahab received so many blows that he became punchdrunk and from underneath said [in English] "That will do," meaning "Enough, brother." In those days I knew no English. I did not understand what "That will do" meant. I thought its significance was that he still had some strength left! So again I began to hit him with my right hand. Then the overseer waved his hand and said "Boy no." I knew the meaning of "no" and I released him. Afterwards I said, "Understand that if you charge me, I will kill you." The overseer spoke broken Hindi and could understand a little also. He said to me, "Don't tell anyone about this thing." I understood his intention. The thing was that if news spread to the people of the plantation that a white man was beaten by a coolie, then the white man would be sent away, and it would be said that if a man who is assigned to supervise one hundred coolies' work is beaten by one, then he is not suited to the work! I shook my head that I would not talk about it. Then the overseer sahab said, "From today you and I have become friends." Although I did not understand his language, I understood his intent from his gestures and the way he spoke. And I understood very well those few corrupted Hindi words that he spoke. Then, giving me a few of is own pennies, he asked me to get coconuts, and he gave me a coconut to break open and drink, and kept one for himself. While drinking the overseer said "Good luck." I didn't understand, but seeing his face I laughed, and I said that today, the sahab must have known what "good luck" is.

## THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION ON THE PLANTATION

One time a doctor came to give examinations. I thought that if he wrote "full task" for me, then I would die of work. Some hundred labourers stood surrounding the doctor. The doctor began to examine them with a stethoscope. When I saw that it was a while before my name would be called, I moved a step outwards, and then ran from there. The doctor didn't see me running off, because there was a large crowd. When my name was called off, I was present. Because of my running, my heart was beating fast. When the stethoscope was put against me the doctor said, "Do you have any illnesses?" I said, "I have asthma." The doctor said, "The Calcutta doctor didn't write that you have asthma." I said, "In those days my sickness was controlled and I was fairly healthy. Now the asthma has come up again." The doctor fell

for what I said, and wrote "half task."

I had to lie this way. If I had not been clever then "full task" would have been written by my name, and I would have died working, I would have been lying in prison dying of hunger, or I would have been eating the blows of the overseers, lords of the world of death. Now, although the lord of hell (Yama) will punish me for telling this lie, I will bear it happily. I did the half tasks and earned six pence a day.

Only I know the hardships which I had to suffer for five years. When I became free after five years I had fifteen shillings of debt. Listen, readers! Having been hungry and having worked hard for five years, what did I earn? Not only myself, my hundreds of brothers who are freed from girmit don't have money at all. Yes, there are a couple of free men who may have saved five or ten rupees a year while working in girmit. On becoming free, I borrowed a few pounds, got a small piece of land on lease, and planted sugar cane. When there was some profit from my field, I thought I should write a letter home. I did not think about this and send a letter in the meantime, because my family would be upset if they read a description of my troubles. When eight years had passed since my arrival in Fiji, I wrote a letter to my brother in Calcutta working as an assistant. In this letter, I very briefly described all the difficulties which I had to suffer in Fiji during my girmit.

I thought in my heart that my brother would be very pleased to get my news. After one and a half months from the sending of the letter, I began to expect an answer. In the end a letter came from Calcutta. When I received the letter, I felt a great uneasiness at opening it. I opened the letter and read: "When your brother read the account of your troubles there was a great shock to his heart and he quickly had a very high fever. For two days the fever continued, and he died suddenly on the third day." I was saddened to hear this heart-rending news, and one by one all the incidents of my childhood began to come back to me, all the times I used to eat with my brother. When I remember the troubles which I had to suffer because of the wicked arkatis then the wound in my heart becomes fresh again, and from my mouth these words suddenly come: "Oh God! When will the coolie system be ended, and when will my brothers escape from these crafty arkatis?"

When my mother got no news about me, she became very

worried. The people of my village say that one time a sadhu boy [1] came to my village of Hirangau. It is said that this boy's features were similar to mine. When my mother heard that a certain sadhu who looked like me had come, she went to the sadhu, and running, embraced him. She said, "Son, why have you become a sadhu? Pity your suffering mother now, cut your top knot and come live at your house." The sadhu said, "Mother! I am not your son. I am not a Brahman, I am Kshatrya." But my mother's mind, thinking about me over and over, had become so unsteady that she would not believe what the sadhu said. In the end the sadhu was so bothered that he left the village!

After about two years of working, I studied the Fijian language and began to speak and understand it well. For one year I learned to be a carpenter, and afterwards I spent many days learning metalwork also. I learned to take photos so that I could take pictures of Indians in the fields. I secretly took many pictures in which white men were beating Indian men and women. My thought was to have these photos published in the monthly newspaper "SARASVATI." But one day when I was gone to Suva, some unknown person came bringing a false letter from me, asked for the pictures, and took them all! I came and read this letter. His writing was somewhat similar to mine. This was how he pulled it off. I wished very much to take this matter further, but that person disappeared and I had to come to my own country [India]. Therefore I was quiet. Two days after the loss of the pictures, a government officer came and gave me an order that from that day, I should not take any photos of company or other plantation workers in the fields. If I disobeyed this order I would be charged and punished.

I have already written that I began to work in the fields. One time in 1910, when my sugar cane plantation was ready, a very strong hurricane came and my entire crop was destroyed. Afterwards I again borrowed money and began to work. From the grace of god I began again to make some profit.

I generally did things this way: I left my work to my workers, went to the plantations, saw the conditions of my Indian brothers, and gave them advice about their own

1. A sadhu is a world-renouncing mendicant, who wanders from place to place in India conferring blessings and collecting alms, or else seeks a secluded place to better continue his spiritual practice.

welfare. I went myself and saw Fiji's scores of plantations, and reported to the British Indian Association. The aforementioned organization tried to the best of its ability to end the suffering of our Indian brothers. I was doing all of the Hindi language correspondence of the association.

Many of the white planters got so displeased with me that they closed many of the plantations to my visiting. On these plantations where I went to meet my Indian brothers, they made their best effort to force me out. One time I was travelling around and I arrived at a plantation. I was not granted permission to enter the plantation, so I sat on the side of the road and loudly began to sing bhajans [religious songs]. My reason for singing bhajans was that anyone who heard the singing would certainly come to me and listen. Many men came to me in the street, outside plantation. I stopped singing and began to speak with them. While speaking my gaze fell upon a young Muslim woman. From her appearance I knew that she was about to cry! The woman's little girl was standing close to her.

I asked this woman, "Do you have some special problem?" On hearing this she began to cry, and crying, and she began to tell her story. She said, "My name is Laliya, and my husband's name is Ismail. Several years ago, I lived with my husband in Kanpur. My husband carried the luggage of travellers at the station and in this way, from the eight to ten paisas he earned, we three lived - my husband, myself and the little girl. One day my husband was gone to work, and I was at home. A man came to my house and said to me, "You are sitting here at home and your husband has been greatly injured! He taking many boxes, a box fell on his foot, and in several places he was injured. If you want to see him come with me." I was upset and agreed to go with him. He took me and we arrived at the entrance of a big building. He said to me, "Look, your husband is in here, this is a doctor's building. Without a doctor's permission, it is not proper to enter. Wait a little while. A doctor sahab will be coming soon."

After a short wait, a man wearing coat, trousers and eyeglasses came. The man who had brought me from my house said to this doctor sahab, "Look, doctor sahab, this is the wife of the man who you are treating. She wants to see her husband." The doctor sahab said, "I won't let her see him right now. You fool, don't you understand? Right now there is a great injury to his heart. His life is in danger. If he saw his wife, then there is no doubt that he would

die, and there would be great shock for this woman also. I will be treating him for four or five days now, then you will see him. He's not going anywhere."

The first man said, "Sir, she has nothing to eat. Where should she go?" The doctor sahab said "All right. Prepare food here for this woman and her child." In this way I began to live there with my small daughter. The man fooled me for ten days, saying "Your husband is recovering now. Not today, see him tomorrow." After ten days the doctor sahab came. I asked him to let me see my husband. The doctor said, "You are still here! He left the hospital four or five days ago. I stressed to him that he should stay, that he hadn't rested, but he said, "my children must be dying of hunger, I will not stay." Therefore, being distrustful I left.

In the road, three men standing far from each other met me. The first man said, "Where are you going? Who are you looking for?" I told him the whole story. That man said, "Your husband's name is Ismail." I said "Yes." Then he said with great surprise, "Oh! He was sent to Calcutta, he was fooled by the arkati." I was very shocked. A little farther, the second man also said these things. Moving ahead, the third man said, "Afterwards your husband came to your house. The arkatis have fooled him, saying "Your wife was sent to Calcutta." Therefore he went to Calcutta. To meet him, you should quickly go to Calcutta too." I agreed to go to Calcutta. That man sent me to Calcutta with other men who were going to Calcutta. When I arrived in the Calcutta depot I learned that my husband had been sent to Fiji three days before. After this, I was sent here with my daughter. It has been three years now, and I'm dying of working at this plantation. I don't know where my husband is. I would be very grateful if you could bring me together with my husband."

After saying all this, the woman began to cry loudly. And her child also cried, saying "Father, father." I said to her, "Child! Have written for me your husband's name, your in-laws' names and so forth, and your whole story. I will look for your husband." I wrote her whole story in my diary, and having calmed her down I travelled by steamer and a few hours later arrived in Suva. On arriving in Suva I went to the Agent General, and asked him to talk to his office clerk and have a list made of the addresses of the plantations of all the Ismails who had come in the last three years. The Agent General said to me, "I'm not your servant,

to cause things to be done for you." I heard from someone that there was a man named Ismail on a particular plantation. I decided to go to this plantation first.

When I travelled by steamer and arrived at this plantation, I asked for Ismail, and then asked about his wife. Sweat broke out on Ismail's face, and shocked, he said, "My wife was Laliya." I told him, "Your wife is working at a plantation which is five hundred miles away. On your behalf I am sending a petition to the Agent General for fifteen days of vacation. You sign here." I wrote the petition, and took it with me.

Then travelling by boat I reached the plantation where Laliya was working. When I told her the story she became very happy, and tears came because of her happiness. On her behalf I wrote a petition to the Agent General. Taking both petitions, I went to the Agent General. The Agent General got very angry and said to me, "Go! I don't know! The planter knows." I was very disappointed, thinking "What shall I do?" In the end, I thought, "Let's go, I should go to the planter, and ask him for the leave." After that I took Laliya and went to the planter. The planter yelled at the two of us, "Aren't you listening? Why are you bothering me? My work will suffer! ... The cane is ready to be cut. Go. I won't give you leave!"

Returning home, I decided that I would get them the leave, soon, by some other means. What happened on this side was that Ismail, while working, got sick from worrying about his wife and daughter. He made a request and was sent to the hospital. The hospital doctor sent him back to work and wrote, "He is not sick. He is making excuses." The poor man went back to work. This time his condition became even worse. He was again sent to the hospital, and the head doctor saw him and wrote, "He has leprosy. He is very weak, and therefore cannot work. If you want to give him wages for sitting around, the go ahead and give them. The alternative would be to send him back to India. There is a ship going in fourteen or fifteen days." The owner of the plantation decided that he should be sent to India right away.

When this news reached me I went to the hospital. I asked Ismail and he said, "According to what the doctor has said, I am being sent to India right away, by force. How can I meet my wife now?" I thought that it had become a calamity. I went to a barrister immediately, and gave him

two guineas out of my own pocket, for him to try anything to stop Ismail from being sent to India. The barrister sahab made an effort and investigated, and then said that his going was settled. What could I do then? The ship was about to leave. I walked from there and came to the ship. I saw that Ismail was already brought on board the ship. Ismail's heartfelt wish was to meet with his wife. At the time the ship left for India Ismail's eyes were full of tears. Although he was not able to say anything to me because of his unbearable sorrow, the sorrow dripped from his visage. I also was deeply sympathizing at the time. I thought in my heart that my effort was all useless, and that I could not fulfill the promises I had made to Laliya. I told a sailor on the ship to take care of Ismail. "He is sick. Help him the best you can." The ship left. I went back home, saying "It's God's will."

When the ship returned from India to Fiji, the sailor told me that as soon as Ismail put his feet on the land of India, in Calcutta, Ismail died. I was very grieved to hear this. I began to think, how am I going to tell this news to Laliya? She must be looking forward to seeing Ismail. With strong heart, I travelled to Laliya's plantation. Reaching there, I first told her that, "Your husband has been sent to India." She began to cry loudly. Calming her down, I said, "Your girmit has very few days left now. We will have you sent to India also, in four months." The next day, on Sunday, I told her about his death. On hearing this, Laliya fainted and fell sick. With great difficulty, after fifteen days of great suffering she became a little better. Only she herself knew her suffering. The planter gave her work continuously, even in this poor condition!

These thousands of pounds, shillings and pence, for which the planters are committing atrocities on human beings, are contemptible. These money-grabbing wealth-hungry planters say,

> Material resources of the colonies cannot be developed without these labourers.

In my understanding, it is a million times better that the colony be ruined and penniless, than that human beings be bound in chains of servitude.

# TOURING AUSTRALIA

There are many among us who don't know whether or not one or two hundred Indians live in Australia. What can the cause of this be, except lack of enthusiasm? There is no wish born in our hearts to try to know something about our Indian brothers living in other countries. To change this state of affairs, five or ten among us should go to travel among these islands where Indians have settled. When the kings, and rich, educated people of our land want to travel now, they go straight to England or France.

One time I wanted to go to Australia for travel. I had to get permission from the Australia government. I arrived in Sydney. I went to a hotel, gave seven shillings and stayed there. I was given a room separate from the white people. I went to my room and laid down. On my arrival the news passed around that a black man had come. Then what happened? Many men and women came to my room to see me! I got very tired of this crowd. Quite a lot was said about me. A woman said to me, "All black, have you got no soap?" I thought that it wouldn't be right to reply to her. I was afraid that if these people knew that I can speak and understand a little English then they would be asking questions and wouldn't leave me. I asked once, loudly, in the Fijian language, "Lako sa levu na oso oso" meaning, "Go away, the room is full." Hearing this many people went away, but many women just stood there. I became thirsty and took my **loTâ** from the bag. On seeing the loTâ they began to shout, "Come, come, look at this water pot."

Hearing this there was again a large crowd. From among the crowd one woman said "This is clean," and another woman said it had never been cleaned, and in the meantime a third woman took it away and began to clean it with bathing soap. How can a lota be cleaned with bathing soap? Then another woman said "Use sand soap on it." When this was done the loTâ was clean. After this I wanted to go to the toilet, and began to walk with the loTâ Again they were all surprised. When I returned from the toilet, the hotel manager's wife said, "You have spoiled our latrine." I replied angrily, "Then give me back my seven shillings, I will not stay here." I thought, "Living here will be very uncomfortable. Go to the house of some Indian brother and stay there."

It will not be improper to say a few things about Australia-dwelling Indians here. In Australia, there are some 6644 Indians. No more Indians are allowed to settle in Australia now. The "Education Test" which Natal started is current in Australia as well. An Australian officer gives a test to the newly arrived Indian, concerning whether he can read and write in English. They force them to fail the test, and then don't let them enter into Australia. Whatever the intention is in the tester's heart while giving the free test, they only can know well, who ever gives this kind of test. You should give attention to the situation of these helpless people, who have come spending many rupees and enduring many troubles, across the seven seas, and then having failed the test, are sent back. Would it be good if the Australians coming into India were from wicked moral behaviour given a test in Hindi?

However, it is a good thing that the Australians are not extremely cruel the way the South Africans are. The Australian government does not commit outrages against the 6644 Indians who have settled at this time in Australia. Although the new Indians are not allowed to settle in Australia, permission can be obtained from the Department of External Affairs in Melbourne for travelling or for a change of scene. But there is a big obstruction for this also, that one has to pay a security of one hundred pounds. The Indians who have settled in Australia are mainly Punjabis, Sikhs and Pathans. The Sikhs are mainly wheat farmers, and the Pathans keep cattle. These people cannot read or write at all. But it is a thing of pleasure that these people can buy land and houses like Europeans do. They have political rights, and are able to vote for members of Councils. They can go to all the public institutions and can stay in hotels. Even the police do not commit any particular outrages against them.

Before, the whites of some particular plantations had provoked the Sikhs and Pathans, but when the Indians gave them three or four blows with a stick in answer, then they did not have to courage to provoke them again. Australians are generally of the view that Indians get angry very quickly, take canes and get ready to fight, and that therefore, provoking them is not a good idea. Why ever it should be, we will certainly say that Australians are many times better in their treatment of us than the South Africans are. Yes, and one thing is surprising. This is that Australians do not make it a disaster when an Indian man marries an Australian woman. Their policy

is that when Indians earn their money in Australia, then they should spend it there.

Australian women are very wasteful with their money, and half of the income of whoever marries them is spent by the memsahab. The Pathans have mostly married Australian women, and there are quite a few Sikhs, also, who have married these women. These men are not able to take these women and their descendents from Australia to some other place. This is not lawful according to the Australian government. It is true that people of our country have married poor Australian women, and from this it is certainly clear that the Australians are not prejudiced against blacks.

I came out of the hotel and began to search for an Indian home. Accidentally I ran into an English man whom I knew, who had worked in Fiji. He took me fifteen miles away from Sydney and showed me the house of a Punjabi Jat named Mevaram. I went to Mevaram Ji's door. I told him my whole story. He gave me a big welcome. Mevaram was married to an Australian woman and was being called by the name "Mr. Mev." He brought two or three shillings worth of apples and grapes for me. I was very hungry indeed, so I ate and had a good sleep. I stayed at the home of Mevaram Ji for many days. Then I toured around Sydney and so forth, then went back to Fiji by steamer.

## HOW CAN IT BE NECESSARY FOR INDIANS TO COME TO FIJI NOW?

No more Indians should ever go there as a coolie under contract, but if they want to go paying their own way then they can go. Those men who know the work of blacksmithing, and know how to attach a horse shoe, could spend their lives there very well. That sort of man can earn three rupees a day. In Fiji surveyors are greatly needed. No doubt surveyors make a big profit there. Lawyers and barristers who are selfish, and whose aim in life is to make money, should not go to Fiji, because in Fiji lawyers and barristers like Manilal are needed. What is needed above all in Fiji is Indian doctors. If a doctor went there from India then he would be able to help his brothers very much. Barristers who want to go to Fiji should take their degree certificates with them. The men of high status

who yawn at the thought of behaving with heartfelt love for their brothers, and of planning for their release from inner suffering -- for them to go is not proper. Those in whose hearts dwell the qualities of peace, mercy, forgiveness, benevolence, service for country, and deliverance for the poor -- from them can be the deliverance of our foreign-dwelling brothers. Those who have no interests except a propensity to always earn money should have mercy and not go to Fiji.

Blessed are those who abandon their self-interest, and take part in the suffering of our overseas brothers. They turn away from their own families and come to the islands, giving peace to their brothers. If such people went to Fiji, then many troubles of the Indians suffering there would be gone. The present Governor of Fiji, Sir Bickam Sweet-Escott, is very generous and justice-loving. I can say without doubt that such a good Governor has never before come to Fiji. The Governor has said, "It is my heartfelt wish that the Indians of Fiji should become educated and should begin to participate in the workings of government." The progress of Fiji is mainly dependent on the progress of the Indians there, because the people who are natives there are slowly decreasing in population. There are 40,000 Indians there, twelve times the number of Europeans. They are able to come to Fiji from ports in India by way of New Zealand and Austrlia. One has to have permission beforehand to disembark in Australia while there, but there is no problem in going off while in New Zealand. The cheapest route is to come by British India Steam Navigation Company ships which are called the "coolie ships." We coolies are fooled and sent by these same ships. The ones travelling around on these ships know that on these ships there are many troubles for our brothers. The coming and going of these ships is not well scheduled.

## TRAVEL TO MY OWN COUNTRY

है ऐसो कोउ अधम मनुज जीवित जगमाँहीं
जाके मुख सों वचन कबहुँ निकस्यो यह नाहीं
"जन्मभूमि अभिराम यही है मेरी प्यारी
वारो जापै तीन लोक की सम्पति सारी"
सात समुन्दर पार विदेशन सों करि विचरन
भयो नाहिं घर चलन समय हरषित जाको मन ?

(जगन्नाथ प्रसाद चतुर्वेदी)

This passage above is true word for word: perhaps there are some men in the world who are so base and mean that they would not be pleased at the time of coming home from a foreign country. Living in Fiji for twenty-one years, an intense wish was born in my heart to see my mother and my homeland. I told my thought to Doctor Manilal, and he said, "If you go there and do some work, it will be good for you to go." I said, "There is not enough intelligence in me, and also I am not well-enough educated. What kind of help could I give my brothers there?" Mr Manilal said, "I will give you a job -- to go to the villages and speak publicly against the coolie system, and to describe the troubles of our rural brothers here." I said that I would try to the best of my ability to follow his instruction. Afterwards I notified the Immigration Department that I wanted to go to India.

From there the reply came that on the 27 March 1914 a steamer would leave for Calcutta from Suva. I should be in Suva by then. After this, from every district in Fiji representatives came and gathered in Suva, and in Suva they gave me a congratulatory letter. Although I was not at all worthy of this respect, it is our religious duty to respect the instructions of our gurus, and thinking this I obeyed their instructions. These people also instructed me to tell the people of the villages about our sufferings, and to agitate against the arkatis to the best of my ability. At the time I parted with these people, feelings of sorrow and happiness both were born in my heart. I was sad because I was parting from my brothers, and happy because I was coming to my mother country.

The Immigration Department had advertized beforehand that whoever is about to leave for India should come to their office in Suva. Hearing this some 1300 Indians gathered at the Immigration Office. Many among them had already sold their house, farm, all their belongings, and prepared to go to their homeland. With this hope they gave away their things for half or one-third price. But among them only 833 were taken, and the rest, undergoing a calamity, were sent away. The father of one Indian who was staying in Fiji had died in India. His mother's letter came to him in Fiji, saying that she was dying of hunger, and that she had no money, that he should come right away no matter what. This poor man came running to the office. When he came from the crowd and was about to come inside, a white guard caught him, and locked him in a room. The next day he was accused of blocking the way to the Immigration

Office. He was fined ten shillings and not given permission to go to India. In his heart there was an intense desire to meet his widowed mother, but he was stopped from coming to India because of the wickedness of this guard. Readers! Can you imagine the suffering of this man?

Then we had to go to the Suva depot. Our attendance was called every day. We were treated like cattle there. A crime was committed by one unfortunate Indian; he picked an orange from an orange tree. And for what? Because his small child had been crying for a long time for an orange. Then what happened? The white sahab grabbed his hand, pulled him along, and took the orange and threw it away. The ticket he had gotten to go to India was taken away from him and he was thrown out of the depot! He would have to stay in Fiji. When a train leaves just as we reach the station, and we don't get on, then we all feel very sorry, even though we expect in this case that in four or five hours another train will come. How terrible this man must have felt, then, who for the crime of picking an orange had to stay back for a whole year and suffer more hardships.

A day before the ship sailed, a clerk of the Immigration Office asked us, "How many rupees are you taking home?", because this thing is written here. Many of my foolish brothers have it written that they are taking 2000 or 4000 rupees. Afterwards, reaching Calcutta, I came to know that they had no money, that they didn't even have the fare from Calcutta to their homes! These people did not understand that from having false information written, there is great harm. Whenever someone describes the suffering of the Fiji-dwelling Indians, the Immigration Office people present testimony, that "Look, coolies earn so many hundreds of thousands of rupees every year, and take them back to India." In addition to all this, the Immigration Office clerks do not understand anything about zeros. Some coolie says, "I am taking fifteen rupees home," but the clerk adds one zero and writes, "150 rupees." And apart from this, if anyone is wearing rings and so forth, then he writes that value of it, increased ten or twenty-fold. For example, if someone is wearing a silver ring the clerk would ask, "What is the price of this ring?" The person says, "Sir, this was brought for eight annas." The clerk says, "This ring for eight annas? Not less than eight rupees! I am writing "8 rupees" in my price register." Saying this he writes "8 rupees" as the price of the ring. It would not be surprising if hundreds of thousands of

rupees were added on by this kind of writing.

With respect to boarding in the boat, the head clerk of the Immigration Department gave us trouble. If someone had too much luggage with him then he had to bear great difficulties. The clerk allows a man to bring as much luggage as he can carry at one time. They don't allow him to go a second time, even if his luggage is sitting in the depot.

We were put onto the ship like goats and sheep. There is no need to describe the troubles on the way. One time they distributed food to my brothers on the ship and the white doctor taking a stick in his hand was beating up one or two Indians. I took his photograph. The white doctor knew about this. He came to me and asked, "Please just give me the photo. Let me see how you take pictures." Fooled, I gave him the camera together with the plate. He quickly threw my camera, plate, and so forth into the ocean. I just kept on watching!

In the ship we 833 Indians came back from Fiji. Among us about 500 people did not have the fare money to get to their homes from Calcutta. People who say that Indians going to the islands collect wealth should open their eyes and give attention to this fact. At the time of my going from Fiji, I came to know confidentially that I would be searched. Therefore I erased my name from my box with coal-tar, and wrote the name of a friend. In this box were many papers and letters, accounts of the troubles and sufferings of the Fiji-dwelling Indians, and also copies of judgements of magistrates. There were copies of the correspondence with Gandhi Ji and Manilal Ji and so forth. Although there wasn't a single harmful item among these things, I thought that the Fiji white men would not leave me alone, would follow me on the ship. At the end the search came. The true box, with my papers in it, was with one of my friends, and a different trunk was searched.

On the ship we had collected donations, and paid the fares for eighteen men to go to their homes. I thought that we would go into Calcutta, meet with a barrister, have an account of our sufferings written, and send a petition for help to the government. For this I had prepared sixty people, and to take care of their needs I had gathered more donations. In April 1914 we arrived in Calcutta. Seeing our homeland, we were delighted at heart. The sad thing is that the people I had prepared to go to the barrister

went in all directions on disembarking from the ship, and I stood there alone! The happiness that I felt myself, from touching my mother's feet when I arrived home in Hirangau was indescribable!

## CONCLUSION

In this final chapter I should say something about the coolie system.

Anyone who will go to the colonies and see with their own eyes the Indians who are working under girmit, will surely come to know that the explanations for the public servants and the written report of the commission do not reveal the real condition of the foreign-dwelling Indians. Those who can see with subtle vision are able to know immediately that the coolie system is only a new form of slavery. Sir Charles Bruce has written in a book titled THE BROAD STONE OF EMPIRE that "When white people are not able to do the manual labour in tropical countries, then the black labourers were needed. Before the end of the slavery systems, African people did the work of labourers, but when the slavery system ended, those freed Africans began to understand that this work was extremely inferior and menial! In some colonies, the native people were so primitive that they were unable to do field labour by prescribed rules. These things caused the use of the coolie system, and with this system coolies began to be sent to Mauritius, Natal, Trinidad, Jamaica, British Guyana and so forth."

In 1857 Lord Salisbury wrote about this system that the British government had greatly reduced warfare in India. For this reason the population had increased. From this people could not subsist easily. Therefore it was good for Indians to go to other countries where they could get more work than in their own country. At the end Lord Salisbury wrote:

> Above all things we must confidently expect, as an indispensable condition of the proposed arrangements, that the colonial laws and their

> administration will be such that Indian settlers, who have completed the terms of service to which they agreed, as the return for the expense of bringing them to the colonies, will be free men in all respects, with privileges no whit inferior to those of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects resident in the colonies.
>
> (Saptahik Bharat Mitra, 1 June 1914)

It is not necessary to say that what Lord sahab hoped for was completely groundless. The suffering our brothers are given in the colonies has no end. From this the government also suffers, because, when outrages are committed against Indians there, there is agitation here. In the Royal colonies the white planters treat us as if we were donkeys and dogs. If this treatment was given to people of other nations, this coolie system would have been ended long ago. Some Japanese were brought to the Fiji Islands under contract. But even though the whites gave more comforts to the Japanese than for us Indian coolies, about one third of the Japanese died of the hard work. Then the Japanese government took all the Japanese back from there. Solomon Islanders also were brought this way to the Fiji Islands to work in girmit, but they also were unable to bear the suffering, and were also brought back.

It is only the Indians who can work twelve hours without good food. I can speak from twenty-one years of experience, that it takes three English, Japanese or Chinese labourers, to do in a day, with great effort, the amount of work one Indian labourer can do in a day, if the inconveniences they face are the same, and the food they eat is the same. When the Fiji people asked the Chinese government for labourers, then the Chinese government completely refused. Did our government make a firm decision that the coolie system should not be stopped? Is it not the duty of the government to protect its subjects? The Japanese, Solomons and Polynesians have stopped the sending of coolies to Fiji. So why does our government give permission for as many coolies as are wanted to be collected and taken from this country? The country whose freedom-loving people have tried with heart, mind, and wealth to end the slavery system, yes! The people of that very country are made helpers of the coolie system, which is like the slavery system. How sad is this! When Mr Douglas Hall asked about this in the House of Commons, then Mr Montague, the undersecretary, said,

> I may add that the recent Inter Departmental Committee under Lord Sanderson has recommended that the system be allowed to continue subject to certain recommendations in regard to particular colonies and they are under discussion.

We will know, when the English people are sent for a shilling a day in the coolie system, when they are given four and one half seers of sharps and a quarter seer of raw dal for seven days food, a tin basin for storing food and a tin cup for drinking water, when for three men one room in the coolie line is given for sleeping, when they have to sleep on the soil the rats have dug up, without sheets, mattress or pillow, when they have to get up at three o'clock in the night to get ready for work, when they get kicked once or twice a day by the overseer. Then would Lord Sanderson and Mr. Montague still say that this coolie system should be continued?

When Rajrishi Gokhale presented in Council a motion to stop the coolie system, then Council member Clark sahab accepted that the coolie is not told the true terms of the contract. On page 316 of the government gazette of 1912, Clark sahab writes that:

> It is perfectly true that the terms of the contract do not explain to the coolies the fact that if he does not carry out his contract or for other offences (like refusing to go to hospital when ill, breach of discipline etc.) he is to incur imprisonment or fine.

The sad part of this for us is that knowing all of these things Clark sahab supported the coolie system! Possibly, Clark sahab wanted to destroy the rights, freedom, even the lives of the Indians for the sake of the planters of the colony!

As far as I know, now Surinam is the only foreign colony of the sort where coolies are sent like in the British colonies. In other words, there is very bad treatment given to us in all the colonies, but the amazing and sad thing for us is that we are treated worse in the British Colonies

than in foreign colonies. W.W. Pearson, who went to South Africa, has written about Portugese East Africa in the July edition of "Modern Review." The gist of Pearson sahab's story is that the people who are proud to be born in the British Empire and who believe that people are treated fairly and equally under the British flag, will be very ashamed to see that the treatment given to Indians in the Portugese colony is better than that given to them in British colonies.

# THE OPINION OF DINBANDHU ANDREWS ABOUT THE COOLIE SYSTEM

In the January 1914 MODERN REVIEW Dinbandhu C.F. Andrews[1] has written many meaningful things about the coolie system. To give here a translation of what he has said would not be irrelevant. Mr. Andrews sahab writes, "But now I see that the question of the Indenture system is a question of saying goodby, and there will be great advantage to free Indians from the settling of this question. My belief is that our very first duty in India now is that we should all get together and agitate for the making of a law that no other Indian will ever for any reason be made a coolie under contract and be sent away. I call this law the "Abolition of the Indenture System." We should give as the first reason for the closing of this system of contracts that it is improper for a civilized country to have its citizens sell themselves into a kind of true slavery. Because India is now gaining a place among the progressive nations of the world, Indians are therefore taking a strong vow that "We will destroy this coolie stystem from its roots, because this system is ruining our reputation." If someone submits on the side of the coolie system that argument that the financial condition of the Indian coolie working under contract is better than his financial condition when he was free, then the answer to that is that this argument was made on behalf of the slavery system. It took fifty years to end the slavery system! It is not necessary to refute this argument in detail because history refutes it. If someone makes the argument that there are many laws made to protect the coolies in the coolie system, and that there are not outrages in the coolie system of the sort there were in the old slavery system, then I will not contradict it. I will only show that last year, while there were 37 suicides per one million people in India, there were 662 suicides per million among the coolies working under contract in Natal. Here it is appropriate to note that this year there was no special reason for suicide, and should you take another year, the proportion will always be about the same. The system from whose type this result comes is itself extremely culpable,

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1. Andrews, called "Dinbandhu" or 'friend of the poor,' was an associate of Gandhi. He later came to Fiji and wrote very influential reports on the evils of Indenture in Fiji.

whether it has many laws of protection or whether such are never made. If in different conditions, the fruits of suffering born from this system were not apparent, even then, this system is very dreadful. In it there are so many opportunities for injustices and outrages that the most intelligent thing is to completely end the system. If for the argument we also consider that planters will be merciful, and that laws will be brought in use to protect the coolies from all angles, then we should say that for a progressive nation this system is completely inappropriate and unworthy. No one can imagine this system continued in England or America in the way in which it currently is in India. We ourselves have come to know the inhumanity of the system in India, and we recognize in our hearts the disgrace which is ours from this system. If the only fruit of the efforts of Mr. Gandhi, the greatest hero and most excellent man of the present time, would be that the aforementioned motive was produced in our hearts and we engaged in work against the coolie system, then Gandhi's efforts could not be said to be fruitless or useless. I believe that we should also make gone our other sins. We should put an end to our inhuman treatment of the lower castes. We should also remember this. But the question of the coolie system is an important question right now.

"If we face this question and deal with it fairly and with justice, then we will be respected in the eyes of the whole civilized world. Can we get together and prove that the coolie system should be ended? If we are ready for this then we should get together and work. Whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, all should say with one voice that the coolie system should end. Then no one can stop our clear and just request. For this we should bury our self-interest and show the world that we are not only talking, that we are working with determination. In this we should deal with other self-interested people in a just and reasonable manner. There will be opposition and retaliation against us. The destiny of Indians has become uncertain with this unbearable injustice. We don't know what to do! From all directions people are saying, "What should we do? What should we do?" Come, let us get together and end the coolie system. If we do this, then this work of ours will help the agitations of our free brothers in the colonies a great deal."

We can praise Dinbandhu Andrews from one hundred voices, and every Indian will be grateful to him for his kindness. The only difference between the slavery system and the coolie system is that the former was for life and the latter for

a fixed time only.

WHAT IS OUR DUTY? -- The duty of every Indian is to assist in agitation against this system. This is not a seditious practice. Arkatis violate government law and lure people. We agitate against the arkatis. Therefore in our understanding this activity is completely loyal. In some places speeches against the coolie system were arranged, but because they were tricked by the arkatis, people thinking this activity was disloyal did not give a place for the speech! How sad it is that we are willing to give our places for dancing and singing, but when asked for a place for a lecture against the coolie system, the place is not given! It is the first duty of newspapers to always publish things against the coolie system. Except for the Hindi newspaper BHARAT MITRA and the English newspaper MODERN REVIEW, I have seen very few newspapers who have given particular attention to this. We should praise the speaking out of the editors of the aforementioned newspapers. The other newspapers should follow their praiseworthy work.

It is the duty of landowners to teach the people of their villages not to get snared in the traps of the arkatis. It is proper for the people whom the Lord has made wealthy to give financial aid for this effort. They should form committees to prohibit the coolie system at each place. People who have good speaking ability should be asked at times to say a few words against this coolie system. It is the duty of those who are council members to present resolutions to the Legislative Council against this system. If this work can not be done by these people, then considering this as representation of the public is a big misconception. For us it is proper to become voluteers, and to save travellers on pilgrimage from deceitful people.

## WHAT IS THE DUTY OF THE GOVERNMENT?

It is proper for the government to end the system without delay. The atonement for the sin of creating this system is to end the system immediately and to make schemes and start activity that increases the demand for labour in India, our own country. In Madhya Pradesh there is a lot of vacant land, and what shortage of land is there in Riyasat? In other regions there are many districts in which many places

are vacant. For example, Basti district in Uttar Pradesh and Ganjan district in Madras, etc. It is the government's duty to try to settle people in these places.

It is the duty of Congress to make a special conference in which we would all be informed about the things to be known concerning foreign-dwelling Indians. There should be great agititation in the newspapers about each one of the outrages and injustices committed against our brothers in other countries. The Commerce and Industry Department, which the government has opened, in which millions of rupees are spent, has a duty first of all to cause the kind of business to be opened in which Indian labourers could find jobs in their own country.

It is my belief that wherever a depot is opened, there I should go personally, and according to my insignificant intelligence, tell about the suffering in the islands. But in this country I need the help of the public. Reader, please write to me. In which cities are depots open? I will surely write the names of those places into my touring programme. I will make an effort to go there, according to my schedule. I cannot say anything more on this subject because of lack of space.

We should believe that the coolie system will end. It will surely end. When the leader of our country, Rajrishi Gokhale is agitating against it, then we should never be disappointed. Rajrishi Gokhale, making a motion against this system in Council, said that

> This motion, the council may rest assured, will be brought forward again and again, till we carry it to a successful issue. It affects our national self-respect and therefore the sooner the Government recognizes the necessity of accepting it, the better it will be for all parties.

It is necessary to make special requests of the government about this. Until the government will understand its own interests as the interest of its subjects, the dissatisfaction of the subjects cannot be destroyed. To give satisfaction to the subjects is the first of all the duties of the government.

Readers! I have requested your help, according to my

insignificant intellect. Possibly after reading this some people will say, "Let it go. Why are you listening about coolies? If some educated man speaks then we listen and believe." I apologize with humility to such goodhearted people, and in conclusion say this:

Dear Countrymen! We should all get together and agitate against the coolie system. If we made an effort with mind, heart and strength then God will surely help us.

# INTRODUCTION TO "The Story of the Haunted Line"

by John D. Kelly

"The Story of the Haunted Line" first appeared in Hindi in the special overseas number of MARYADA, published in Banaras in 1922. This well-crafted story describes Indenture life at a personal level, and from that personal level gives insight into girmitiya suicides, social relations in the line, and relations between coolies and Fijians. Any attentive reader will note that a great deal of anti-indenture argument has been injected into the text. However the real point of this story is not political but religious. It is a moral tale, complete with the sacred verse which is its message. It is intended to show that men should be devoted to God, that God gives shelter to his true devotees, and rescues them from harm. Because the major message of the story is religious, it will be useful to know something about the background to girmitiya religion. Because Sanadhya and Chaturvedi write as Hindus, this Introduction will discuss girmitiya Hinduism.

There is a firm consensus that the religious life of girmitiyas was impoverished. The isolation from India and family religious practices, the lack of pandits, and as we have discussed in the Introduction to MY 21 YEARS, the pollution of coolie status, all contributed to the religious difficulties of the time. Not only modern scholars but also Charles Andrews and even MY 21 YEARS itself regard the religious state of the girmitiyas as confused and impoverished. Indeed things were so confused for some that they could not state the most basic facts about their faith, as the following note from a court record (Supreme Court Criminal Case #12 of 1907) reveals:

> the next witness cannot be sworn as she says does not know whether she is a Musulamani or a Hindu and does not know the meaning of religion having been born in Fiji.

Yet somehow the Fiji Indian community as a whole remembered its faiths, resisted the Christian Mission, and despite the decomposition of caste relations, have maintained a vital Hindu (and Muslim and Sikh) tradition to the present. We should not let the story of girmitiya religion rest with the idea that religious life was confused and corrupted, or even with the idea that Indians struggled back against this adversity and re-established many of their religious traditions. Though this was true, there is something more still.

Religious traditions are not longwearing durable possessions which people simply hold or lose. They are very powerful orientations to the world. They determine essential aspects of the thought and behaviour of people who take them seriously, and often, through unconscious presuppositions, do the same for people who do not. As such, they are also very sensitive and are constantly changing in small and large ways, as the experience and perceptions of adherents are also transformed. "Hinduism" in form and content has changed radically over time, and one particular set of developments, focussed on a remarkable set of fifteenth and sixteenth century saints, is of particular importance to understanding the Hinduism that developed in Fiji.

This efflorescence of a new religious outlook, often called "Vaishnavism", can be traced to a South Indian philosopher named Ramanuja. Ramanuja reacted strongly against the dominant Hindu philosophical system of his time, Shankara's Advaitavedanta. Shankara's central doctrine was that the soul and the ultimate divinity were one, but that the soul did not realize this non-duality because it was ignorant. Its ignorance left it open to the workings of karma and dharma, trapped it in endless cycles of rebirth. Ramanuja disagreed, and argued that the soul's problem was not ignorance, but lack of faith. Ramanuja's philosophy of Vishishtadvaita or "qualified non-dualism" was that the soul, while not different in substance from the ultimate, truly was separate, a fragment of the whole, and that only a positive relation to the whole, attained by devotion, could bring the soul to self-realization. This devotion is called bhakti, and the bhakti theology developed by Ramanuja and his many successors had a radical impact on Hindu doctrines.

The truly ancient Hinduism of karma theory, in which actions alone had consequences, had already been greatly transformed by the doctrines about the soul, knowledge and ignorance taught by Shankara and many many others. However,

the impact of the new theology of bhakti was perhaps even more revolutionary because of the pragmatic promise it offered in practice. If the deepest reality of existence was one's relationship with an ultimate God, and one could affect that relationship by devotion, then there was great prospect and importance in prayer. If one had enough faith in God, God could shelter one from the vicissitudes of life, rescue one from kaShT, and even, said some, from karma. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries great saints made bhakti theology and practice very popular in India. The first was Ramananda, who advocated devotion to Rama, the great avatar of God who came to earth to save us all from sin. A disciple of Ramananda was Kabir. Kabir accepted most of Ramananda's teachings but rejected worship of images, and merged his bhakti theology with Islamic theology to create a new religious way, now called the Kabir Panth. Kabir in turn influenced Guru Nanak, who make bhakti a cornerstone of his new way, Sikhism. Other important bhakti preaching saints were Vallabha, who travelled from South to North India, and Chaitanya in Bengal. These two saints preached bhakti to Krishna, who made this world for us to enjoy.

In India, as many scholars have shown, these ideas have become a regular part of religious thought and life, co-existing with the caste system. However, most of the bhakti saints were anti-caste. In principle, bhakti theology was egalitarian -- human beings could not be at root of different jati or types if all were really atomic parts of the substance of God. In practice, many bhakti teachers initiated their disciples, taught new egalitarian ways of living, and in many cases, encouraged "renunciation" of the world and its castes.

In MY 21 YEARS it was noted that there were many wandering sadhus in Fiji during the years of Indenture, who taught religious lessons and initiated disciples. Their sects were listed: "Kabir Panthi, Ramanandi, Satnami, Gusain, and so forth, many types of sadhus." The Kabir Panthi and Ramanandi, said to be most active, were the followers of Kabir and his guru Ramananda. The Satnamis were the followers of an eighteenth century splinter from the Kabir Panth, led by Jagjivandas. The "Gusain" or Gosains may have been part of a group known as Gosains, who were wandering sadhus devoted to Shiva, or they may have been followers of Gosain, the son and inheritor of Vallabha. If the latter is the case, then all of the sadhus Sanadhya lists as wandering in Fiji and enlisting devotees were part of this "Vaishnavite" bhakti theological movement -- all stressing its monistic, devotional

and anti-caste message.

In Fiji, with its caste and religious order disrupted, these wandering preachers were said to have found receptive audiences. In another manuscript by Totaram Sanadhya (cited by Gillion, FIJI'S INDIAN MIGRANTS pp 147-8) it was claimed that thousands were initiated as adherents of the Kabir Panth and Ramanandi movements. Some of these sects, such as the Kabir Panth, continue in the present, while others were ephemeral, disappearing when their gurus died or went back to India. In any case, there are still sadhus in Fiji today, and more importantly, the religious path of bhakti has come to take a position of orthodoxy among Fiji Indians. Among girmitiyas it provided hope, negated most functions of the lost castes, and was the buttress against Christian pressure. According to Sanadhya, the sadhus often reconverted the Christian converts. Bhakti even provided the new organizational form: the Ramayan mandali egalitarian cooperatives organized to express devotion to Ram by singing the Ramayan of Tulsi Das -- himself another Ramananda disciple. Thus Hinduism was not simply maintained by some in Fiji -- it developed its forms in the local conditions.

In "The Story of the Haunted Line: we can glimpse the problems of disorder and ignorance in Fiji Indian life -- but also the informal beginnings of mandali organizing and education in the bhakti orthodoxy. Finally, we should recognize that the text itself is an attempt to teach the bhakti ideal, written to show how the divine promise of shelter had actually been realized, in Fiji, in Sanadhya's life.

# THE STORY OF THE HAUNTED LINE

by

Totaram Sanadhya

On the twenty-eighth of May, 1893, I arrived as a labourer under contract to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company at Nausori Plantation in Rewa district. With me were one hundred forty other men. On the order of the plantation manager, an overseer came to us and gave us all houses in the coolie lines. My 140 companions were all given houses to live in, and only I was left without a house. The overseer said to me, "There aren't any empty houses here right now. Come, you will be given a house in the haunted line."

First it is necessary to write briefly here the story of the haunted line, from which the reader will understand my own heart-melting story. There were twenty-six coolie lines for the labourers under contract to Nausori Plantation to live in. In each one of the coolie lines there were twenty-four rooms. Each room was eight feet wide and twelve feet long. Three men lived in one room, and one room was given for married couples and their children. In this way about one thousand five hundred men and women lived in these lines. Separately, at a distance of six chains from these twenty-six lines, was the "haunted line" in which indigenous Fijians who were working for the company used to live. When eight Fijians had died there from illness, the rest of the Fijians left this line and ran away. Since then this line got the name "haunted line." No one was willing to live there. No one would pass by that line at night. If any new man came to live there without knowing about this line, as soon as he learned the story he fled from fear.

The overseer took me to the haunted line and assigned me a room. I put my things in this room. The overseer said to me, "You are given this room to live in for five years. If you leave this room you will not be given another one, and you will be punished for the crime of leaving this room without permission, and sent to jail." Saying this, the overseer left.

I strolled around and saw the haunted line from all four sides. There were twenty-four rooms in it, and on all four sides was tall grass. Anyone sneaking around, standing outside in this grass would not be seen. In the grass were lots of mosquitoes and crickets. A little distance from the line in one direction was a very large sugar mill, and our ears would go numb from the noise of its engines. At three chains distance a river flowed. A bad smell was coming from the rooms of the line, and in the rooms were heaps of filth left by rats, because there were many rats inside the rooms. Except for the rats and myself there was no one in these fourteen rooms. Six or seven dogs would also come to rest for a short time. I thought that I would fulfil my whole five years of contract at the haunted line.

I quickly got up, cut all the tall grass in front of my room, and cleaned. I threw the rat filth outside the room. The room was clean in four hours and I spread the blanket and sat on it. Just when I sat down, mosquitoes from the tall grass outside, hungry from several days, clung to my body in hordes. There was no place on my body left open. Bumps rose all over my body from the bites. I became very itchy. Panicky, I went outside the room. After a short while I saw two rats running around inside the house, on whose backs the mosquitoes were gathered like locusts. The helpless rats ran into their holes. The mosquitoes also went into the holes, behind the rats. Having gone into the hole they brought the rats out again.

The bumps from the mosquito bites swelled to the size of rupees. I made smoke inside the house, and with this effort, saved my life from the mosquitoes. Then I took a brick into the room and made a cooking fire. At the same time there came an instruction from the company office for all new coolies to come to the office to get their food supplies. All the new coolies began to go. I also, the haunted line coolie, went with them, and got seven days supplies from the office, or: three seers of sharps, one seer dal, a quarter seer ghee [clarified butter], an eighth of a seer of salt, and so forth. Taking these I began to

walk home and the manager said, "Hear this order." I stopped and the manager said, "These supplies are for seven days' food. They should not be sold. Don't get anything else instead. Don't feed anyone else. Those who don't obey this order can be sent to prison for one to three weeks. If you finish the supply in the middle of the week, then you die of hunger. You won't get supplies from the office in the middle of the week." Hearing these instructions I went home, and pondering, I thought, that this is a good country, in which someone is sent to jail for the crime of giving food.

Thinking this I arrived home. I cooked, ate and drank, and then sat. At that time an old free brother saw me, came to me and said, "Oh brother! You are staying in this line! Oh no! The ghosts stay here! How are you to be found alive here, where so many men have died? Touching your forehead, I am saying it again." Hearing these words of the free brother, I became quite surprised, but what could I do? My feet were still shaking from the order of the overseer, that I would be punished for leaving the house. I said, "Brother, help me. Have me given another house. The overseer has given me this house." Hearing the overseer's name, that poor person, surprised, said, "Oh no! He is very wicked. With this one, we cannot do anything by ourselves." I said, "Very well. It is Krishna's will then. Whatever will happen will happen. When the ghosts of the line come, I will face them. They are the ghosts of the line, I am the ghost of the company. In this way there will be a battle between two ghosts. If I win, then I will throw the ghosts out of the line. I know well how to fight with ghosts." Hearing this the brother left. And I, being tired, went to sleep.

In the morning I rose and went to work. In this way I worked every day and came home in the evening. After cooking, eating and drinking I studied the Pandava Gita. When I got sleepy I went to sleep. This book of the Pandava Gita was written by my older brother Ramlal. He gave it to me with great love. I loved this book very much. I kept it with me at all times. Thus, when I would go out I would take it with me, and I would sit and read it, with its commentary, to ten or eleven o'clock every night.

There was a devotee by the name Baiju. He came to me, and listened to the Gita with great love. In this Pandava Gita there was one verse which I used to repeat and repeat, and I had great faith in this verse.* The devotee Baiju would sit with me until eleven o'clock at night and hear me tell the Hari Katha [story of Krishna]. The people of

the coolie lines asked Baiju devotee, "Devotee Ji, where are you going every day?" Then he told them that, "A new coolie has come. He is a son of a Sanadhya Brahman, and he lives in the haunted line. I always go to him, and listen to the story of the Gita." Learning this the people were surprised and said, "Oh! The ghost didn't do anything to him. Because of that ghost I could not stay in that line. On the second or third day the ghost used to kill. It seems that from the reading of the Gita the ghost has run away from that line. Oh devotee Ji, tonight I also will come with you there and see that Brahman."

Saying these words, these people came with Baiju devotee to my house. In this way people came to know me from the notoriety of the haunted line. Most of the men and women believed that "he must have knowledge of controlling ghosts." From this faith, whenever a boy or girl became sick, they were brought to me at once. People came running, saying, "Maharaj, this child is sick. Do some sweeping and blowing [i.e., drive out the spirit]." I explained again and again to them, "Brother, I don't know anything," but they insisted, and wouldn't leave me. Seeing this, being helpless, I gave them four or five tulsi leaves, and thus freed myself from them. People came and went from me in this way.

On Sunday I went to the coolie lines to visit. At the line someone was singing âlhâ [a type of narrative verse], some were reading Ramayan, some were playing khanjarîs [timbrels] and one-wires and singing bhajans, some were swearing, some were welcoming their close friends, some were gathered in groups teaching tricks. Some were standing with head bowed before the sardar and the sardar was showering offenses at them, and threatening them. Some were saying to the sardar, with tears flowing, "You are my food-giver [i.e. master]. It is good if you kill me. We work day and night but do not earn enough money to fill our stomachs. Now we will not live, sardar!" Listening to these poor people's voices, even a hard heart could have been shattered, but the sardar paid no attention to their crying. Listen, making this hard heart hard, it was the image of cruelty. Seeing this sight, tears flowing from my eyes, moving ahead I came to the lines in which our mothers and sisters coming from India were living. The country from which they had come, of which it is written in the Mahatmya Shrimad Bhagavat that God, thinking heaven insignificant, always wished to be born in India, the country in which the great lord Ram Chandra was born, and bearing the suffering of exile, kept alive his religious dignity, the country in which Sita and

Anusuiya were born, this India where Maharana Pratap was born, suffered many troubles (kaShT), and protected the motherland, this India where thousands of heroines in Rajputan jumped onto the pyre, sacrificed their lives and protected their virtue, by the changing of time, yes India! You are no longer that India! Today your thousands, having left their mothers, sisters, parents, husbands, and children, are sitting in coolie lines in Fiji. Unknowing, you are sending these women to do the work of slaves in foreign countries, trapped in the snares of the coolie system, made powerless in all ways. Is there another country of the sort where its women, trapped in chains of slave type, are sent into exile? Why are they sent? They are raised by the food and water of India, they will work in the fields of white lords, and, tears of their blood flowing from their bodies, they will fill the pockets of their white lords with their earnings!

Thinking this I walked and stood under the mango tree in a square. This square was built on four corners, as a yard of four lines. Standing, I saw that women had begun their work. Some were washing dishes, some were cooking, some talking with each other about mother, father, husband, children, and crying. The work stops at night time. When tears of sadness (dukh) flow in memory from the eyes of those who had left mother, father, husband or child in the home country, they then take deep breaths and open their eyes, and begin to do their work again! They think for some time, then again there is a surge from their hearts. The tears remain in their eyes, and sobbing, in low voices, they say to one another, "Oh sister, tell me where are our brothers?" Swallowing her words, lowering her head, tears flowing from her eyes, for a moment she needs to be washed. Then another woman leaves her work, comes near and, crying herself, wipes her friend's tears with the corner of her veil. In a voice overwhelmed, she says, "Oh sister don't cry. What will we do by remembering? What comes from crying? There is no one to be mother, father or brother. The arkati should be ruined. Oh God, the whole family is left behind. Oh God, I did not ever do work at my home. Oh sister, how will I spend these five years of girmit? Saying this she cries. These women remembering their mothers, cry very loudly. Five or ten crying women surround her, soothing her.

On seeing this heartmelting sight, I began to look in another direction, and I saw a woman washing old torn clothes on the bank of the river, tears flowing from her eyes. She stopped washing and cried loudly. I went to her and asked,

"Sister why are you crying?" With patience, crying, the woman began to tell me. "Seven years after my marriage my husband went to heaven. In the house was my husband's old mother, and my three year old son. I left my son with my husband's mother and went to Dwarika. There I bought some pictures. Having seen, I came back to Mathura with the villagers. There I was left behind by the crowd of my village companions, and in that condition was trapped. Many memories came to me of my mother-in-law and son. If God gave me death now it would be good." Tears began to flow from my eyes when I saw the condition of those in the coolie lines. And standing there I cried loudly. I went home to my house in the haunted line with thoughts and uncertainties flowing like waves in my mind, in the way of a crazy person. A little while later I sat dumbly, and thinking it was the will of God, I began to work. When my mind was settled, I prayed to God: "Oh God, protector of the poor, you are the one who delivers across the boat which is fallen in a whirlpool. Please protect the woman of India who have come to Fiji."

One day, Baiju the devotee came to me, sat down and began to cry. I asked him, "Why are you crying?" Then he said, "From when I became a gurumukh [a disciple], I have kept my topknot, and worn on my neck the garland of tulsî [a type of wood] given by my guru. Today, the overseer Mr. Meo, who lives in Korociriciri plantation, broke my garland and crushed it with his shoe. Then he grabbed my topknot, shook me, and said to me that tomorrow in the hospital my topknot is going to be cut off. I am very sad about this." I explained to him, "Devotee Ji, leave everything up to God and have patience." After Baiju the devotee left, I was worried for some time, and then I settled my mind and went to sleep.

Morning came. On Saturday I worked for half the day. Coming back from work I got the supplies from the company office which are given one week's food. The next day was Sunday. It was a holiday in the lines, and I was at home. Asking their way, five of my Indian brothers came to my house. By asking I found out that two were from Agra district and three from Kanpur. We met with great love. One after another we told and listened to stories of girmit troubles (kaShT). Then I cooked all of the dal and sharps I had received for the week, and served my five visitors. When I served the visitors I felt very sad in my heart -- if the food was not enough and the visitors did not eat a stomach full then I would die of shame. But God saved me from shame, and the food was enough for the visitors. After eating the food

the visitors went to their homes and I left the pot I had cooked on the cooking fire, because there were no more supplies in the house. What use was the pot now? For this reason, I completely forgot even to wash and clean the pot!

After my guests had left I went to the sardar and asked about work. The sardar told me the number of a field, and told me to be present in the field at 6 o'clock in the morning. There, he said, he would tell me the work I would have to do. The field whose number the sardar had told me was three miles away from the coolie lines. Coming back from the sardar, I came to my house and prepared my tools for the work. After this I thought, tomorrow I have to work in the fields. Monday is the first day of the week. Seven days are left, and all the supplies that were in the house were used up entertaining the visitors. On Saturday I will get supplies, but how will I spend the days in between? If the manager learned that I had fed the supplies I received to other people, that now there was nothing in the house, then he would charge me, and I would certainly be punished by the court. For this reason I could not ask for food from anyone. I didn't come to any conclusion in my thinking. Seeing that night was coming I slept.

At dawn on Monday I went to the field and did all the work I could all day. In the evening I came home. The day of Monday was spent without food. Tuesday was a day off because so much rain was falling. That day no one went to work. I also stayed home. By noon that day my hunger was very cruel to me. Because of hunger, I felt fire burning in my stomach, and my body was weak. However the day passed and evening came, I lit the lamp, sat and began to read the Pandava Gita. It was ten o'clock at night when I laid down. On lying down the flames of my stomach were blown out.

Suddenly I got up and sat. Getting up, my head spun and before my eyes I began to see red, green and yellow flames of fire. In both of my ears the sound of ringing bells began. It was dark before my eyes. Sweat broke out on my body. I had no knowledge of outside things at that time, and many thoughts and uncertainties began. I was seeing these sights as my deep sleep began. In this condition I saw many shows of sorcery. One unusual show I saw was that I sitting in my house in India. That is my house. My brother, family and so forth are sitting there. In the house there was a great commotion, and I also was part of this crowd, at the door. Just then my beloved mother came to the door, and seeing my mother coming, I put my hands together, ran, and

fell to her feet. Crying, I said, "Mother, I am dying of hunger." My mother, with tears in her eyes, lifted me up with both hands and held me to her heart, and said, "My son, don't go to any other country. See, your face is dry from hunger. Come, I will give you food." My mother took my hands in her hand and walked, stroking my head with her other hand. Going home, she gave me food. There is my jar, from which I used to drink water. There is my stone basin, in which buttermilk was served. My companions surrounded me from all directions. Someone among them asked, "Brother, where have you been for so many days?" I answered him, "Fiji." On giving the name "Fiji," I became excited. My eyes opened. Tears came from my eyes. It was not my house, not my mother, not my friends, there was no food before me, no jar, not my basin, not my village. I was sitting in Fiji's haunted line. Oh! Saying "Fiji" I ruined everything. I lost everything. Pangs of hunger rose in my stomach. I remembered my beloved mother. Crying and crying I began to hiccup. Somehow I calmed down and slept. Turning over, getting up, sitting, I spent the night.

Morning came, and it was Wednesday. Clouds shaded all directions, and rain was falling in a sprinkle. A cold wind was blowing. For healthy and full-stomached people, this cold is nothing, but for empty-stomached people feeling pangs of hunger this rain and cold wind is the time of death. Sitting in my house I thought it would be a day off, good. I was feeling feverish from the cold. Hope for a day off was strong and I was becoming cowardly. Then the overseer arrived.

The overseer, having come, said to me, "You will go to field thirty-five and cut grass. Go quickly." Hearing this it was as if a mountain fell on my head. Water covered my hope for a day off. From fear of going to prison I took up my hoe and set off for work, and went a short distance from my house. My feet began to shiver and I was sweating. I sat. When I felt stronger I got up. In this way, getting up, sitting down, crying, breathless, I reached the field at ten o'clock. I reached there, but he who has no food in his stomach cannot do hard work. I could not even stand holding the hoe. So how could I work? I threw the hoe to one side, and sitting, I began to uproot the soft grasses slowly, one by one, by hand. When it was two o'clock the overseer came to me to see my work. I was sitting. The overseer said, "Well, you haven't done any work today." "I am sick sahab." Overseer -- "What sickness?" Me -- ajirN [indigestion]." Overseer -- "What? I've never heard of

"ajinn." [1] This is a new word. Tell me properly." I said, "Listen sahab, this is a disease of the stomach. If medicine is not given for it, it will burn like fire and make the body weak. In the stomach fire is always burning. A man forgets all his courage, and in a few days, a person dies from this disease. This is my third day with the disease." Sahab -- "You don't have medicine with you." "I had but on Sunday five sick men came and I gave them the medicine. Now it is completely gone." My legs were trembling, and my body had become weak. The sahab gave me a letter and said, "Okay. Go to the hospital and get your medicine. Come back to work tomorrow."

I took the letter and went to the hospital. The doctor said, "You don't have any sickness. Go from here." I went and sat in my house. I thought that on Saturday I would receive supplies, but that it would be difficult to live for two days until then. In my worries a thought came. On this thought I went to the house of Sarasvat, a Brahman friend, with the hope that if I told him about it, he would give me food. My friend, seeing me coming, with love spread a blanket at his door and made me sit. He began to cook and said to me, "Oh brother, you sit. I am coming right away." Having cooked my friend ate, and put the remainder of the food in a hanging pot. In a rush, he forgot and did not ask me. He came and sat with me. He called on ten or twelve of his neighbors. He asked me, "So brother, what shall I say about India? Will you tell a story?" I said, "Sunday day. I am teaching the story of the exile of King Nala and Damayanti." Speaking had such an effect on me that my feet were trembling, and even my voice was growing softer. "I only came to see you. When Shri Krishna Bhagwan has mercy on me, I will tell you the story of the Mahabharat." Saying this, taking his permission and testing my fate, I left from there.

Walking onward, my glance fell upon the sugar mill. I thought this -- Go to the mill. Inside my countrymen are working. If someone would give me sugar cane juice, then I would drink it and this way my hunger would be somewhat stilled. So, I went to the mill and began to wander in all directions in a crazy sort of way. At one place some Indian workers were drinking sugar juice. One of my countrymen called me over and gave me a jar of juice. As soon as I began to drink it, the white doctor who was in charge of the sugar cane came over. Seeing him my countrymen ran away. The doctor snatched the jar full of juice from my hand and asked me, "Where is your work?" I said, "In the fields."

Doctor -- "Field workers do not have permission to drink the juice of the mill." Saying this, this white doctor set a blow on my head, and grabbing my ear, threw me out of the mill.

After a while I got up and went back to my house and sat. The evening came. Closing the door at eight o'clock I began to think. From not getting any food for three days, today there was no strength in my body. Even my feet shook when I put them on the ground. My throat was completely dry. Just to arrive in the fields for work tomorrow would be difficult. Today I was restless from this suffering (dukh). I had no courage. Then what should I do? It was quiet. It was a dark night. There were clouds in all directions. Rain was slowly falling. There was no sound to be heard. I was alone in the haunted line. In this haunted line I should leave forever the vehicle of my life's journey.

I immediately got up, tied one end of a long jute rope to the rafter of my house, and let the other end hang down. I took my shirt off and threw it aside, tightened my dhoti and tied it, and was ready to depart from the world. I took the Gita written by my brother's hand and touching it to my head, asked for final departure. With thoughts focussed in all ways, I closed my eyes and began to pray to God, and cry. Then I opened my eyes and stood up. I climbed onto the platform and tied the other end of the rope for hanging.

That platform was five feet from the floor, made for sleeping in the middle of the house. The noose was ready, and I was on the platform. The house was completely dark. Taking a deep breath, I said, "Oh God, take me. Away from you I am disinclined. I do not wish to live now." Just then I felt something cut my little finger. I lifted my hand up and a small rat was hanging from my finger. I threw the rat off with my other hand. My finger began to hurt. Ripping cloth from my dhoti I bound it. Taking the rope noose in my hand, crying, I began to put it around my neck. Then someone tried forcefully to open the door, and said, "Open the door, quickly open the door."

Hearing this I was dumbfounded, and I dropped the noose from my hand. Oh who was this? It was twelve o'clock at night. Was this truly the ghost of this line? I climbed off the platform and sat down, thinking, oh let him come afterwards I will finish my work. I peeped through the hinge of the door, but because of the darkness I could not see

anything. I sat, and then the thought rose in the spirit of my self, residing in my heart, which teaches all men to stay away from bad deeds. I began to think that a man should consider firmly, before doing anything, whether the thing he is ready to do is good (dharm yukti) or evil (adharma). If the thing is evil one should always abandon it. (In my childhood my mother always used to say this to me, and the memory of her came to me at this time.) I had been prepared to commit suicide. Was I not a coward? Is it proper that, suffering from hunger, I should commit a great spirit-damaging sin like suicide? No, no. My mother, bearing lots of troubles (kaShT) raised this body of mine. At the time of raising me she suffered troubles (kaShT) like hunger, thirst, cold, etc. The love of my mother was deposited. She entrusted this deposit to the protection of God for use in her old age. Even if by his wish the time of this body was coming to an end, I have no authority to destroy it. I am a man. God has sent me into this world to fight for life. In this battle is the victory of brave heroes. Facing all the troubles of the battle of my life, I should be brave, have patience for coming troubles and face them carefully. God never forgets in his counting. From birth to death, for the whole life, God gives food, clothing, etc. to men. At the time of my father's death, my mother did not eat food for eight days, in order to die. She did not die. If I continue living, then one day I will return to my mother, and will put my hands together and say, "Mother, your trust is standing before you, command me for your help." Parents do not need anything else. Only with the help of children do mother and father become satisfied. Having heard this prayer my mother will be gratified. Whatever orders she gives I will obey. Being gratified, she will be pleased with me.

Yes, today my thoughts went round and round like this. The life of a man who does not settle his thoughts is like a rocking boat. Whatever difficulties will come in the battle of my life now, I will move ahead on the road of my life in the manner of a truthful, proud and strong hero. I will not lose my feet, going back and forgetting. Cowardice is a great sin. It is good to keep it far from the path of your life. I was sunk in deep thought, as if everything having been lost was found. Again there was a loud knocking on the door, and someone saying to open it.

I got up and knocked on the door, and said, "Who is it?" The sound came, "Me." Without fear I said, "What, are you a ghost?" The answer came, "Ghost, ghost, open."

"Come, I'll see the ghost today." I quickly opened the door. With the door open four men came into the house. I lit a light, and saw oh!, these are not ghosts, they are four Fijians. The four sat. Among them one could speak a little Hindi. Before, they lived in this line. When eight of their companions died in this line, they all ran away from here. I asked, "What is you name?" The Fijian among them who could understand Hindi said, "My name is Samu and his name is Maciu, his name is Jone, his is Jo." (He pointed as he spoke.) When the four sat, Samu said, "Brother, give me some food," and saying this they all got very angry. Listening to Samu, it was as if I was confronted by hostility. With tears in my eyes I said in my mind, "Oh God, are you testing me in this sort of danger? With what shall I entertain my visitors?" After thinking I said to Samu, "Brother, I don't have any food in my house."

At the same moment Samu's eyes went to the pot on the cooking fire, and he said to me, "Look, the pot is on the fire. You are stopping me." I said, "Very well, look in the pot." They got up and looked in the pot. About half of a half pound of rice was left from Sunday there. I had completely forgotten about the rice. The four made shares and ate, drank water, and got ready to go. Jo had a bad pain in his stomach. Leaving him in my house, the three went away. Samu said to me, "My brother died in Suva. We are coming back from burying him. You fed us, from today you are my friend. With this much food we will reach our home. Don't go to sleep. I'll come back in two hours." He went, and I was very pleased in my mind that God today kept me from great shame.

Samu came back in two hours. With him were seven more men. They brought four sacks and put them in my house. In one sack was sweet potato, in one was bulbs, and in two were roots like yams. First, I cleaned the pot, I brought water from the river and filled it, lit the fire and boiled the roots. I was served first on the banana leaves and they said to me "You eat first." Then Samu's eyes fell onto the rope which was tied to complete my life's journey. Samu climbed onto the platform, opened the rope and said to me, "I'm taking this rope, I will use it for tying the boat." Saying this he wrapped the rope around his waist and he said to me, "I am giving these four bags of roots to you. You should eat them." They wrapped up the boiled yams and shook hands with me, and then all the Fijians went away.

It was five o'clock. I was served with a pile of yams

in front of me. I got up, washed hands and face and sat. On sitting on the leaf, I remembered the verse: "Worrying about food ..." Suddenly tears came to my eyes, and I said with a slow voice, "Oh father of the universe, I honor you. With great mercy you have saved me from the sin of suicide, you yourself cut my rope. Oh merciful one, you are truly mother and father and protecter." I ate the yams, and slowly darkness left. Red rays of light began to scatter. Here and there people began to make noise. It was dawn. I greeted the sun god (sûrya-nârâyaN) and together with him the new day of my life began.

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NOTES

* Bhajanâchchhâdane chintâ vrithâ kurvânta vaiShNavâh
Yâ sau vishvambharau devah tadbhaktah kimapekshate

Meaning: If you are a devotee of Visnu, don't worry about food and clothing, because God cares for the whole world. From this, his name is "Visvambhar." Being his devotee, what would you wish for (i.e. all would be provided already).

1. Note that this conversation was in Hindi which the overseer does not speak or hear well.

Rarawai mill opens 1886. Note the "polynesian" labourers in front, the Europeans standing

Rarawai.

Nausori Mill

The cane is cut

loaded into boats and carried down the Nausori River

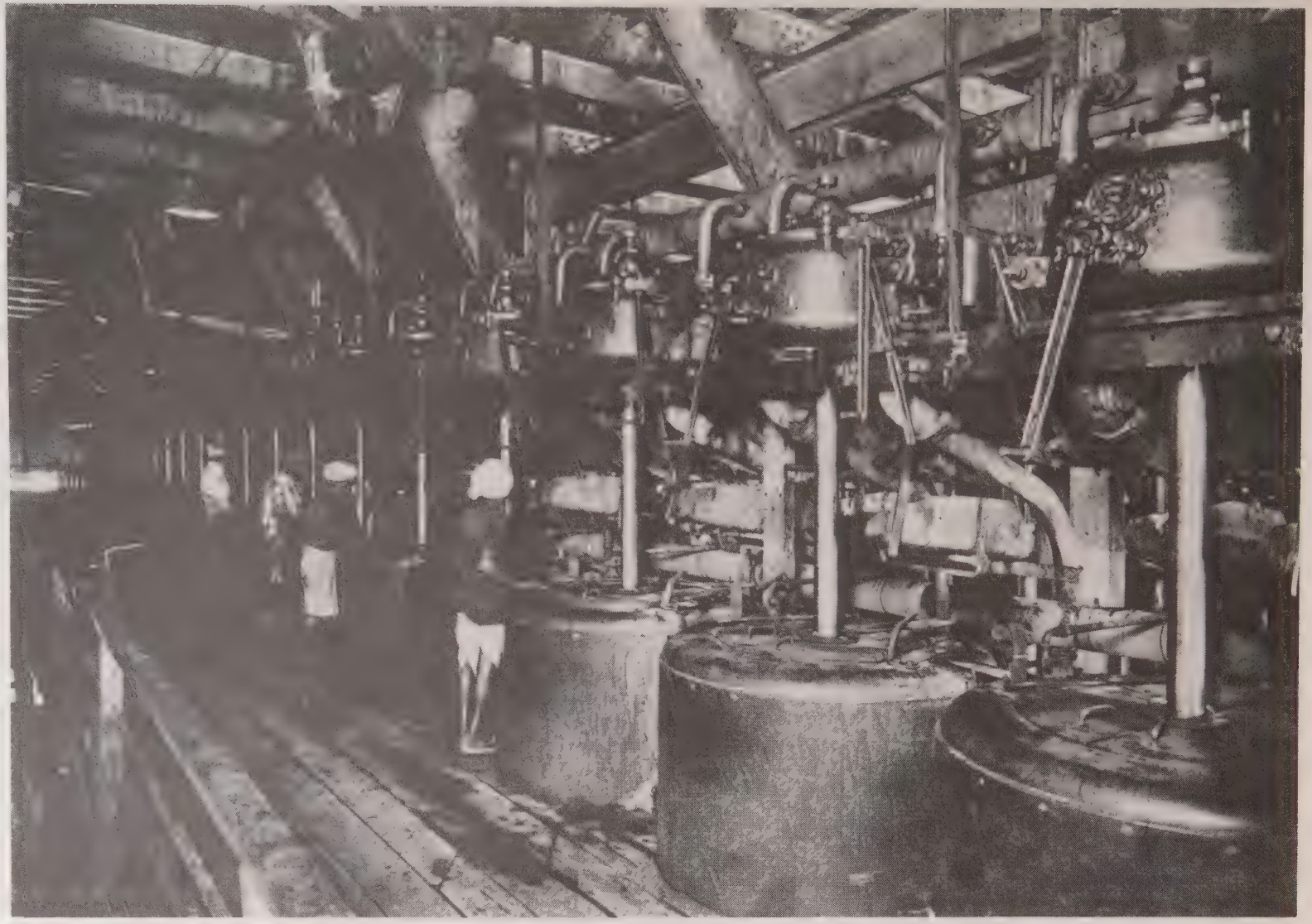
sometimes pulled by steam power to Nausori Mill

where the boats docked and were unloaded,

under the eyes of company officers

The cane was loaded onto horse drawn carts

and brought to the mill



Work in a sugar mill.

Girmitiyas clear the jungle, Nadroga, Fiji, while overseer looks

Work on rubber plantations

"Carrying rubber."

Women picking tea, Wainunu Estate.

Work on a Tea plantation

Work in a hemp factory.

Work on a banana plantation. Note that not all the labourers are Indians.

Copra plantations

Bazaar In The Coolie Lines

A corner in the bazaar

Indian homestead in Fiji

Ram - Lila

Tazias, for Moharram

RAMLILA.
INDIAN FESTIVAL, FIJI.

# FIJI INDIANS AND THE LAW, 1912

by John D. Kelly

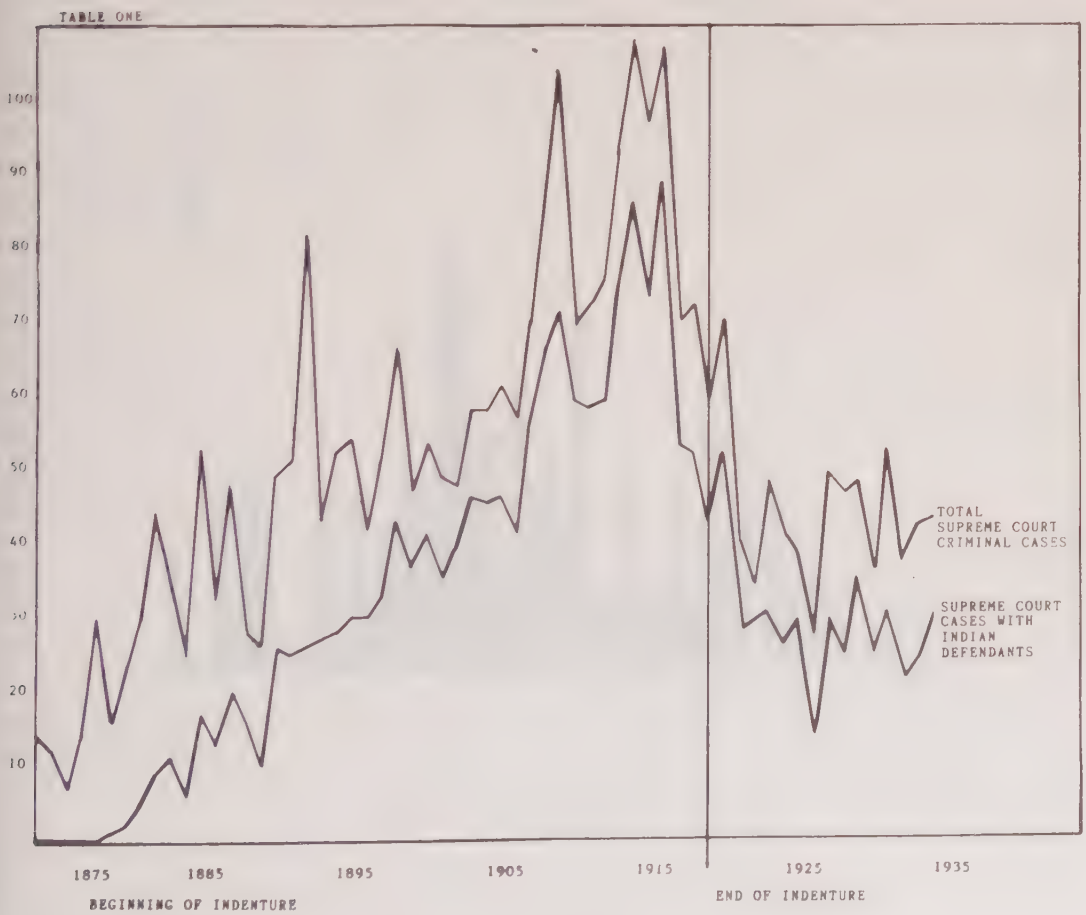
Laws and legal cases are of critical importance in MY 21 YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS. This essay reflects research done to investigate legal matters mentioned in MY 21 YEARS in order to check some of the book's evidence. We will re-examine specific matters like the Education Test for Municipal Franchise, and the outrages against the Punjabis, the Kabuli Pathans, and girmitya women, and we will also discuss generalizations like those made about the behavior of white lawyers and about the true legal and social status of the Indians. However, the essay will not simply or even mainly be devoted to checking the presentations and conclusions of MY 21 YEARS. It will also be trying to further the inquiry proper into one of the book's main concerns -- the legal situation of the girmitiyas and their legal problems. In this essay I have used evidence from throughout the history of Indenture, and after, but I focus on one year, 1912, in order to provide a close framework for investigation of some cases in depth. Many of the events cited in MY 21 YEARS happened in 1912, one of Sanadhya's last years in Fiji -- including the arrival of Mr Manilal, an event of fundamental significance for the political-legal situation of the Fiji Indians.

We shall first discuss criminal law and life in the lines, especially the violent crimes which were so frequent among those serving their indenture, and then civil law, the problems the free Indians had in dealing with Europeans civil society, and their special problems in the civil courtrooms.

## A. CRIMINAL LAW AND LIFE IN THE LINES

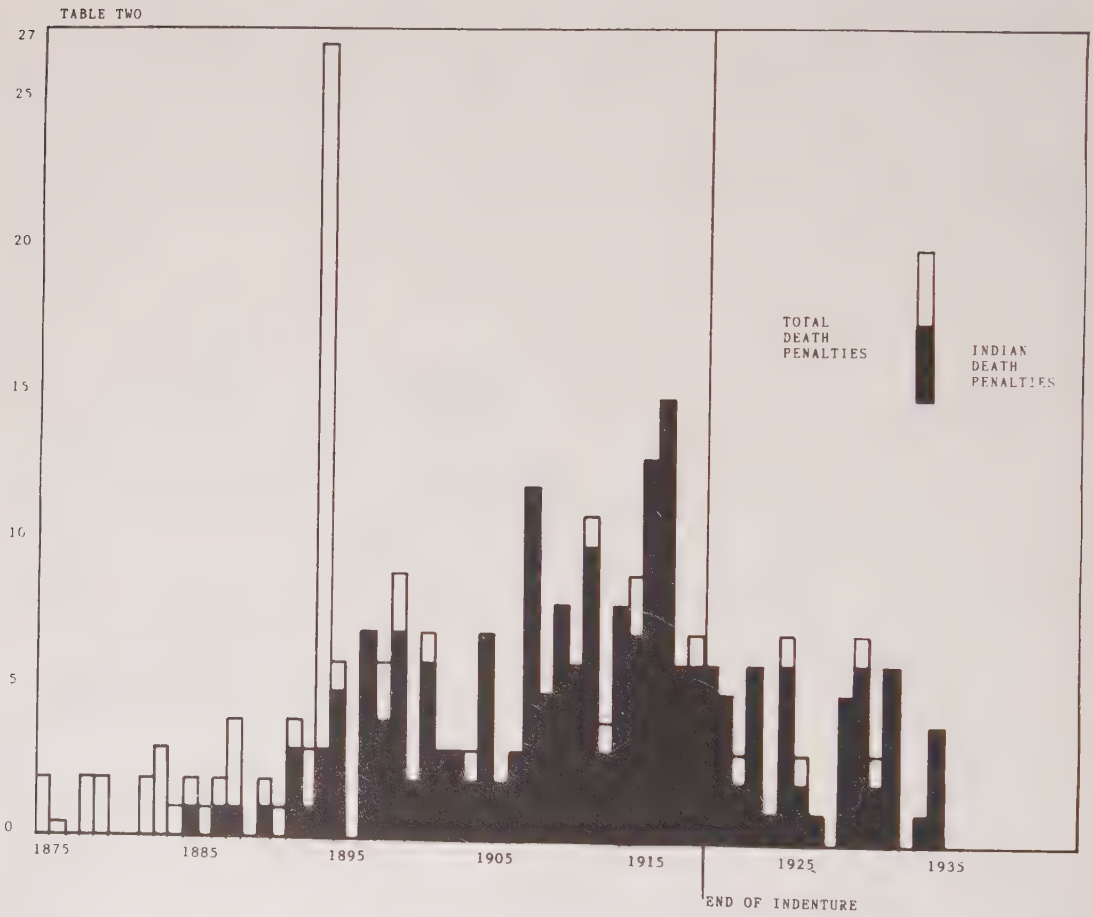
The number of prosecutions against Indians during Indenture were enormous. Not only were Indians in court far beyond their proportion of the population, but their cases glutted the legal system in absolute terms. Starting in 1889, when they were still a trifling minority of the total population of the colony, they provided the minority of defendants to criminal cases before the Supreme Court, and the absolute majority was by and large maintained at both the lower court and Supreme Court levels throughout the years of Indenture.

Prosecutions against Indians spanned a wide spectrum, from the labour law violations which drew £1 or £2 fines and added a few days to indentures, to the murders which drew death penalties. In our discussion, we shall focus on the violent crimes, which were indeed as much a hallmark



of the coolie system as were labour violations. At the end of Indenture, both the general crime rate and the rates for violent crimes plunged dramatically, as the tables compiled from the Supreme Court Criminal Case Register [1] demonstrate.

As table one shows, at the abolition of Indenture, the total number of criminal cases before the Supreme Court dropped by more than one half, and prosecutions against Indians fell by two-thirds -- from an average of over 80 in the last years with ten thousand Indians still indentured (1914 to 1917, the last year with only 9,754 still under girmit) to an average of 26 from 1922 to 1927, five years later.



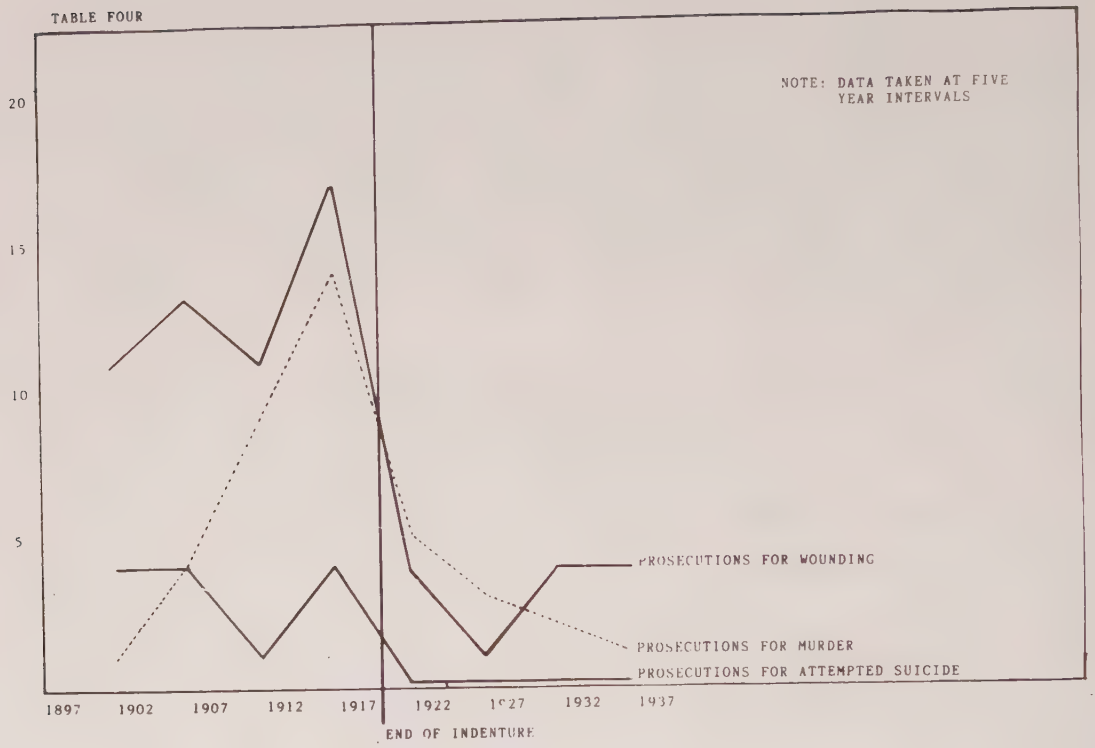
The authors of MY 21 YEARS, following Burton, claimed that "about a dozen Indians are hanged ... every year." While this is not true, the number of death penalties and the percentage of them given to Indians are extraordinary. In 1901 Indians are only 14% of the total population, in 1911 only 29%. Yet they virtually monopolize the death penalty, which is generally for murder convictions. Even after Indenture the Indians continue this near monopoly. However there is a sharp drop at the end of Indenture in the number of death penalties given. From 1910 to 1919 the average was 8.2 death penalties to Indians a year, from 1921 to 1930 less than half, only 3.2. For the clearest picture of the impact of the end of Indenture, however, consider tables three and four.

PROSECUTIONS OF INDIANS FOR VIOLENT CRIMES

(CHARGED/CONVICTED)

| YEAR | WOUNDING | MURDER | MANSLAUGHTER | ATTEMPTED SUICIDE | RAPE | ARSON |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1902 | 11/11 | 4/3 | 0/0 | 1/1 | 2/1 | 0/0 |
| 1907 | 13/13 | 4/3 | 0/0 | 4/4 | 3/2/ | 3/2 |
| 1912 | 11/10 | 8/7 | 0/0 | 1/0 | 4/2 | 1/1 |
| 1917 | 17/17 | 14/11 | 1/2 | 4/3 | 0/0 | 0/0 |
| 1922 | 4/4 | 5/2 | 0/1 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 0/0 |
| 1927 | 1* | 3/1 | 2/1 | 0/0 | 0/0 | 0/0 |
| 1932 | 4/3 | 2/2 | 0/1 | 0/0 | 4/0 | 0/0 |
| 1937 | 4/3 | 1/0 | 0/1 | 0/0 | 1/1 | 0/0 |

* Returned to Magistrate




The most dramatic fall-off with the end of Indenture was thus in total violent crimes. A particular bundle of violent crimes -- murder, wounding (with intent to cause grievous bodily harm), and attempted suicide -- must be taken to typify violent crime in the coolie system. During Indenture their rates were very high, and afterward they dropped most precipitously. To understand these crimes we must consider cases, and we will find that a single dynamic underlay a great many of them.

Concerning prosecutions against Indians for violent crimes at the Supreme Court level in 1912, detailed information is available about the fifteen cases listed in the General Register. Of these eight cases involved indentured defendants, six "free" defendants, and one a prisoner charged with assaulting a warder. This is for a population of which, as of 1911, only 36% was indentured.

Eleven out of the fifteen cases, including six out of the eight crimes involving indentured labourers, are well described by the following generalization, made in 1893 by John Forster, then the Agent-General for Immigration:

> I have no doubt that rightly or wrongly the offenders in the majority of cases do act under a 'sense of injustice' and I think it worthy to note that such offenses are almost invariably I think committed under circumstances which preclude the possibility of the perpetrators escaping the legal consequences. There is no firing through windows or shooting from behind a hedge or blowing up, and they are committed in broad daylight with generally available witnesses of them. Under any ordinary rules as to human conduct or motives these circumstances would be held to indicate a sense of injustice as the probable moving impulse. [2]

In eleven out of the fifteen cases, the crime was, as Forster describes, public, with consequences likely. In all those cases, and in two of the other four, the defendants gave statements when arrested or when charged, despite warnings against incriminating themselves. Statements ranged from forlorn confessions -- as in case #6. "I remember this man coming onto the courthouse verandah, and saying "Lock me up I have cut my wife" " -- to elaborate descriptions of the context of the crime which may or may not have exonerated the defendant, but which usually implicated his enemies. The revelation of injustices often superseded self-interest when the two came in conflict, and defendants usually revealed themselves to be desperately frustrated and oppressed men (and occasionally, one out of the fifteen cases in the sample, women).

This frustration and oppression was caused by the coolie system but it did not always result in a consciousness, like that of Totaram Sanadhya and Benarsidas Chaturvedi, of the inherent evil of the system. Nor did it always lead to violence against the labour system and its agents of oppression. Indeed, only two of the eight prosecutions against indentured labourers in our sample involved attacks on sardars or overseers. There was another, much more frequent dynamic. Six of the eight indentured labourer cases, and four of the six "free" cases, involved women and rivals.

The six cases involving indentured labourers are numbered in the Register as 6, 7, 28, 36 and 41. In case #6, a plantation labourer in Navua struck several times with his cane knife the free woman who lived with him, because she was going to other men and was refusing to prepare his food. He wounded her in the line itself, in front of many witnesses, and then went directly to the courthouse and confessed. He was sentenced to twelve months hard labour and twelve lashes.

In case #7, a 32 year old Taveuni plantation labourer was seen chasing and tackling his wife, cutting her nose with a razor, and when she wrested the razor away, biting off more of it. He made a long statement when he was arrested claiming that the planter and two other girmitiyas were conspiring to steal his wife from him, and that the planter had instructed one of them to carry out this assault and have it blamed on him to get him out of the way. The two girmitiyas implicated were the major prosecution witnesses against him; later in 1912, one of them was found guilty of rape (of another woman) and imprisoned. The accused in this case said at the end of his statement: "I have been married to this woman for 15 years and now she wants to go to another man. I will not let her go as I am married to her." They were indeed married when they were recruited into indenture -- but after he served his three year and 24 lash jail sentence, and then completed his extended indenture, he immediately went back to India, leaving her behind in Fiji.

In case #28, a Taveuni plantation labourer confessed on arrest to having killed his sardar, and again described a conspiracy involving most of the prosecution witnesses, who in this case were to have killed the planter as well. They denied the conspiracy, but no one denied the basic motive. The sardar had at least twice tried to violate the man's wife's honour: her satitva, as in the story of Kunti in MY 21 YEARS. The couple had been in Fiji only three weeks. The man received the death penalty. His wife was allowed to accompany him to his trial because she threatened to commit suicide if kept behind. Two years later she married again.

In case #29, a Rewa plantation labourer killed the woman he had spent all his money on. He refered to her as his "wife" despite acknowledging that she was formally married to a shipmate. She had split her time between the two men and more lately had been seeing the overseer as well. In a morning fight, she ruined all his food, he slapped her

and she left to file charges against him. He pursued her and killed her with his cane knife. When caught he immediately confessed and led police and the planter to her body. In his confession he claimed that the overseer told him to kill the woman. He received the death penalty.

In case #36, the two shipmates working on a Rewa plantation were observed setting fire to a house after padlocking its door. The woman of the couple sleeping inside, freed by a passerby, had formerly lived with one of the arsonists. In this case there were no confessions or explanations about the relationships beyond these facts. Both men, who had entered girmit together at Lucknow, as numbers twelve and fourteen of the same day, were found guilty and sentenced to five years. Both later, and separately, returned to India. The accused who had lived with the woman had left a wife in India when he entered girmit (according to his indenture pass). The man who was with the woman in the burning house was registered as married in Fiji -- to someone else.

In case #41, a Taveuni labourer confessed to murdering a man who had been sleeping with A [3], his woman. He claimed in court that he committed the crime at her request, in defense of her honour, because the murdered man was telling her husband -- a third girmitiya on the same estate -- about her. The murderer's own wife had left him shortly after his arrival in Fiji, he said, but A had lived with him for more than a year, and had said that only death would part them. The murderer's first confession was immediate -- the man, a Muslim, told the overseer that he killed his rival after a short argument, after the man asked, "if he could not have intercourse with [A], would he (accused) give him his sister." The murderer received the death penalty.

Involving free defendants, in case #9 the court found that the complainant had cut his own throat in order to accuse three men of trying to murder him. The men owed him a small sum of money, and one of the three was also accused of seducing the complainant's wife. In case #10 a man was found guilty of wounding the man he claimed to have found in bed with his (Indian) employer's wife. In case #22, a man confessed to assaulting a woman who nearly died from the wounds to her head. The woman was a shipmate married to another man. The accused had always given her all his money, he said, and she had refused to give him food and tobacco before the crime. Finally, in case #25, a woman was found not guilty of attempting to commit suicide when her

confessions were disallowed as evidence. But they are saved in the court records. Left behind by a man who returned after girmit to India, she said she was being forced by a "godfather" to live with a man she did not wish to live with. When this woman was released on bail it was to the custody of this "godfather," a Hindu "priest."

Our sample of cases underrepresents suicides, in part because only suicide attempts that failed ended up in court. From 1907 to 1917, there were an average of close to 17 suicides a year, about 15 by men and 2 by women, 12.5 among those under girmit, 4.3 among those free.[4] Suicide attempt confessions generally reveal a sense of shame and a perception of hopelessness, as for Totaram Sanadhya himself in "The Story of the Haunted Line." But those circumstances of hopelessness often involved, as well as fears of prison and violence, lack or loss of wife rather than, as in Totaram's case, loss of food. No indentured men were tried for attempted suicide in 1912, but we can consider other cases, for instance #37 of 1911. In this case the man confessed to trying to hang himself, claiming that a woman had tried to seduce him, and had told her husband that he had tried "to take her into the bush." The husband threatened the man.

> He told me that when I was asleep he would have my head cut off. I told him I have nearly five years on the estate and have never had anything to do with a woman. He then said that when the sardar came he would have me taken to the manager. This made me feel ashamed as I have been five years on the Estate and had never been accused of interfering with a woman and that is why I tried to hang myself.

This man was given nine months hard labour. The more typical sentence for attempted suicide was one day, however, as was received by the accused in case #11 of 1908. The confession in this case was extraordinary in its details:

> I was here six months and without becoming friendly with any woman. At the end of that time [A's] man went to Hospital. Then [A] asked me for money and offered to live with me. I refused

as she had a man and I did not want to get into trouble. I did not speak to her again for three weeks. After that she took some money that I had in my waist and said that I must live with her. After that we became intimate and I used to give her all my earnings. We have now been intimate for 2 years [months?]. For five weeks previous to my cutting my throat I used to go every day for my meals to [A's] house. For the first three weeks of this time I was happy, but for the later fortnight I was so much in love that I did not feel like leaving her house. I asked her if she had drugged me, and said that if she did not tell me I would take poison. I was three days absent from work. That Friday [A] said she had not done anything to me and told me to go to work. She went away for water. The child cried and I rocked it and then went to sleep. When I awoke neither [A] nor the child were there. [A] came back and I again asked her what she had done to me. When she had gone away I shut the door and lay down again. [A] got a lock from [B] and locked me in and then abused me from outside. Then I thought if her husband came back he would beat me so I cut myself. I do not wish to call any witnesses.

There were also suicide confessions which mentioned work conditions only and made no reference to lovers or rivals. But they were rarely or never as detailed accounts of the circumstances as this one.

We can now return from our cases and reconsider girmitiya violence at the most general level. The aggresive violence of the wounders and murderers seems to contrast strongly with the hopeless passivity of the suicide victims, but in fact they share this hopelessness in attitude. As the FIJI TIMES editors observed on October 12, 1912, "If a Hindu murders his woman he is quite satisfied to die. Probably half the Hindus tried for murder in this colony would hang themselves if it were not for the warder." The direction of violence seems to have been dictated by the situation. Both actions were total abandonments. Motivated by an outraged sense of justice and an inability to tolerate their

situation, girmitiyas lashed out at the agent of their misfortune -- themselves, in suicides, or in few cases, sardars and overseers, but most often at women and rivals for women. Why, when the agents of the Indenture system directed so much violence towards them, was their violence most often focussed on woman and rivals?

One answer would be that this violence was what psychologists call a "displacement" of aggression and hostility towards sardars and overseers, i.e. that girmitiyas were truly motivated by a hatred of overseers and the system, but attacked women because they were weak and not overseers because they were powerful. This kind of explanation fails on several grounds. First as we have seen, the girmitiya driven to violence was not calculating for his own success but expressing his own outraged sense of justice, in a mood of hopelessness about his fate. Second, when his rival for a woman was a sardar or overseer, the girmitiya was still willing to attack, as in case #7 and many more well-known incidents. We have to admit then that the girmitiya men truly perceived their women and rivals as primary agents of their misfortune, in these cases, and thought they were at least deserving of public destruction as the operators of the labour system. To explain the pattern of violence we must explain this perception.

A more famous answer to our question is the explanation generally accepted at the time of Indenture, that "sexual jealousy" resulting from the disproportion of the girmitiya population motivated the violence.[5] MY 21 YEARS, following J.W. Burton's explanation in THE FIJI OF TO-DAY, argued that "the shortage of women here is the biggest evil of all in the condition of the Indians. The result is that crimes of violence, abduction, adultery and so forth are commonly seen in the courts." We should not accept this explanation either, at least at its face value. "Jealousy" is quite insufficient as an explanation of the frequent radical crimes of violence of the type we have reviewed. It does not explain the outraged sense of justice -- the girmitiyas grew "jealous" enough to throw their lives away in large numbers. How can a simple scarcity explain this? The 1911 Census found the total Indian population to be 35% women -- and a European population of only 35% women! If a "shortage of women" naturally produces murderous jealousy then how was the European community of the time immune from the natural law? One could wonder as well about all the schools around the world in which boys and young men board for four or more years with few or no women as classmates. The fact of the

matter is that one cannot predict the social consequences of a "natural" demographic fact like a "shortage" of women, without knowing a great deal about the historical context and the culture of the people involved.

When European observers of the time, like J.W. Burton and A.R. Coates, argued that the "shortage of women" was the cause of the violence, their arguments also relied on their estimations of the racial character of the Indians. Coates, who was the Agent-General for Immigration for more than a decade, including 1912, saw the Indians as naturally brutish, and these crimes as the result of a "murderous instinct," "an outcome of mere brute animalism." [6] He believed that in India the caste system was a rigid system of restraints that held this animal nature in check, while in Fiji it expressed itself -- we have discussed his attitude in the Introduction to MY 21 YEARS. J.W. Burton did not go this far, but still based his explanation on a racial stereotype:

> The Indian is a quick-tempered man, and when roused becomes diabolical in his passion. He is also revengeful. When the spirit of badali (vengence) is once uppermost, no consideration has the slightest weight, save the carrying out of his designs. Once that is accomplished and his victim is punished, he will tread the plank to the gallows with perfect equanimity. [7]

Thus Burton explained the jealousy, the violence and the sense of justice that outweighs self-interest all in terms of the inherent racial character of "the Indian." He told an interesting story to illustrate the depth of the spirit of vengeance he perceived, the story of the time he went to plead with an Indian murderer for his Christian soul. The murderer was very interested in certifying Burton's agreement that both the woman who had wronged him and her lover would be punished by God, but had no interest in repenting his own action. He was quite certain that he had done what he had to do, and was ready to die for it, which he did.

To understand this outraged sense of justice without regarding it as a racial trait, we should consider the

structure of family and marriage in Indian culture, and the impact of the coolie system on these cultural structures.

In the ashrama system of life-stages, all male Hindus had a duty (dharma) in midlife, starting in young adulthood, to be grihasthas or "householders." They had to nurture, support and protect their families, in both financial and reproductive terms. The family they sought to support included their own parents and perhaps many others as well -- it was much more "extended" than the "nuclear" family of Westerners. When it came to marriage and reproduction, this larger "extended" family was again called into play. While having children, and especially a son, was the householder's duty, arranging his own marriage was not normally within his capacity. This was the business of his family elders and involved quite complex considerations of inter-family relationships. Often elders of different families arranged their relations for generations ahead, and planned marriages for very young children, even children not even born. These arranged marriages were usually performed when bride and groom were very young for marriage in Western terms -- perhaps 13, 12 or even younger, girls especially younger than boys. A girl's satitva or chastity was defined in terms of her devotion to her husband, in this system where she married so young that there was normally no question of her sexual life before marriage. The marriage began the satitva of the girl, and it also marked the young man's rise to the status and duties of grihastha, householder.

The girmitiyas came to Fiji from different roles in this scheme of family relations. Married couples came, founding new households. Women came alone, claiming not to be married. The had to claim this in order to be accepted without complications, but given the emphasis on marriage of young women, most of the "unmarried" women were most likely in fact to be either young widows or wives mistreated in their husband's homes. In both cases they were trapped by the satitva ideal and needed the kind of radical escape Indenture provided. Finally, men also came alone, some like Totaram Sanadhya not yet married, some leaving wives behind. While some of these young men cut ties with their families before being recruited, many like Totaram were seeking a means of helping their family by leaving home in search of work and income. In any case, all on arrival came to realize the dirty trick of the system, which as we saw in the Introduction has been immortalized in the folk tradition of the lies of the arkati.

Indian Girls

The dirty trick of the system was, as we discussed, that the girmitiyas were not simply serving a five year contract, but were in fact socially transformed, made "coolies" and enmeshed into a new world that was polluting and destructive of caste and status. While the Introduction discussed this trick in terms of caste, we should now consider it in terms of family relationships. Totaram Sanadhya was profoundly upset whenever he considered his mother's state and plight, and was greatly pleased when he returned to her. In "The Story of the Haunted Line" his recollection of his duties to her was the substance of his realization that his suicide would be adharma, immoral. Most girmitiyas, unlike Sanadhya, never regained contact with their families in India, and were completely cut off, whatever their original intentions, from their family rights and responsibilities. There was no institution in Fiji to replace the extended family as either a locus of duties or a source of support. Instead the new "coolies" lived herd-style in their lines, and had to fend for themselves. Only the pseudo-brotherhood of jahazi bhais, "brotherly" relationships formed on the ships, was available and the void in the orientation of their lives was large. What social and sexual standards were to apply? The world of adultery and prostitution which existed in the interstices of Indian society, beyong the proper confines of family duty, was not difficult to reproduce in Fiji. But how were men to realize themselves as householders? They has to re-establish some kind of family for themselves.

Here the scarcity of women had its impact, exacerbating a problem which already existed. Not only were these men without the social mechanisms which normally made their marriages for them, they also faced a competition to have any kind of relationship with a woman or wife. Finally the need for a relationship was pragmatic, quite apart from both householder duties and sexual interest. The household in India was a large institution and a complex division of labour and women were the acknowledged cooks and housekeepers. In this light it is worthy of note how many of the assualts against women took place not at the scene of "adulterous" activities (although in our sample, two do, cases #10 and #36) but when the women refused to be the provider of food. In case #22, in which no sexual relationship was acknowledged, the woman was assualted an hour after she refused to give the accused tobacco, and the accused's testimony in defense was simply that "I pay her all my money for food and she does not give me any, for which I beat her once on the head with a knife." In case #29 the fight before the pursuit and murder of the woman began when she threw away the man's flour

and ghee. In case #7 the wife who was pursued and assaulted had arrived earlier to serve her husband only half of one chapatti (roti) for breakfast. Finally, in case #6 and #41 the sexuality and commensality were directly related.

In case #41, the rival was killed in the presence of the woman, while eating food that the woman had prepared on the morning when the murderer had seen her at the rival's room. In case #6, the accused confessed on the day of the crime:

> What I want to say is that three times that woman went to other men. This morning she went again to another man. I went to that man's house to bring back the woman. I brought her back to my own room. She sat down outside the door. I told her to make tea. She refused. I told her again to make the food as I had not had any for three days.
>
> She refused and said I will not make the tea as I do not want you. She said if you want a drink of tea drink my water (urine). I told her again to prepare my food and she again refused. I told her to go inside the room. She did not go but caught me by the privates. I then got angry and I had a knife in my hand and struck her about four times with a knife and then left to come down and report at the police station.

Thus we observe the genesis of the "spirit of vengeance," his outraged sense of justice. To a westerner it may seem, like so much else, to really have been about sex, but we should take quite seriously the way it was also very definitely about food, and the household she did not want to enter. When the murderer in case #41 wanted to stress how close he had been to the woman he killed his rival for, he noted that she had promised never to leave him, and that "[she] and I used to eat off the same plate."

The point is not that food per se was the focus of jealousy and rage. It was simply a central vehicle of purity (like ghee) and pollution (like urine) in the Indian system, and thus an inevitable marker and maker of social relations. The point is that the field of social and personal concerns of girmitiya men involved in the assaults, murders and

suicides was much wider that the notion of "sexual jealousy" can encompass.

The girmitiyas were trying to rebuild their lives in their new social world, to be householders and establish households. Thus we find in girmit history the story of many successful marriages, new households and families which went on to prosper. A spot check I undertook of randomly selected ships from the "General Register of Indian Immigrants" showed over 60% of the women listed with marriages registered either on arrival or later -- and not only is this register likely to be incomplete regarding marriages registered after Indenture, but also, many properly conducted and lived marriages were never registered at all. We can conclude that the vast majority of women were married. Next, we also find accounts of complex household arrangements and compromises -- women alternating between men, as in, apparently, cases #29 and #41, or even shared by two men on a daily basis, [8] and also the arrangements, as in cases #9 and #22, in which a woman acknowledged as one man's wife served as cook and household-partner for others as well. Finally, we find the frustration and rage of the men whose fragile new family, the basis of his new social life, was destroyed. Sometimes the woman herself was assaulted, more rarely, the man who was judged to be interfering. And sometimes we find the suicide of the man ashamed of his failures to gain a household, and hopeless over his prospects.

There is still more to be said about this "outraged sense of justice," however. We have discussed the attempts of men to be householders. What of the efforts of women to defend their satitva? In this inquiry, Totaram Sanadhya's story of Kunti leads the way into quite a new set of concerns -- rape, sexual pressures, and in particular, the sexual aggressions of sardars and overseers.

One need not presume that all girmitya women desired to be chaste to recognize that another basic part of the trick of indenture was a world of remarkable sexual pressure on the women. European observers often remarked with pious outrage that the lines had the atmosphere of a brothel, but they rarely traced this fact to its proper cause. Nothing of the disruptions involved in Indenture were usually discussed, the way separation from families, crowding of strangers, and intentional caste-mixing had already created a climate of pollution and degredation. Instead the character of the situation was held again to be the result of the natural traits of the coolies, thought to be lowly scum.

In the Introduction to MY 21 YEARS we touched on this point, that the British thought they were simply recruiting"coolies" and had no understanding of the way they were making people into "coolies." The same was definitely true when it came to the "immorality" of the girmitiya women. Not only did the British create the pollution and despair of the lines. As the story of Kunti was meant to reveal, the overseers used force to create the "harlots" they sneered at.

"Some Englishmen seem to imagine that because a woman is brown she had, therefore, no rights of person; and there is a certain class," Burton wrote,"to whom no woman is sacred, and who profess incredulity if either a woman or her husband are above selling virtue."[9] Walter Gill,an overseer who wrote an interesting account of the indenture system from an overseers' point of view, called an Indian woman to his room regularly. He believed Indian women to be "feral" and "primitive," and referred to the woman he called to his room,who he knew lived with an Indian man, as his "supple, supine Oriental thing of pleasure." One night he made the mistake of asking one of his sardars to fetch her - he normally had made pre-arrangements with her directly - and was horrified to find him pulling and dragging her down the street by her hair. Yet he truly believed that she was pleased with their relationship, that it fitted naturally with her code of morality: " Hers was a wide-eyed acceptance of the reason for her being there. I needed her body, so she was content."[10]

We can be sure that these relations of men in power and girmitiya women provoked some of the violence against the women. In three of the six cases in our sample with indentured men as the defendants and lovers or rivals as the objects of violence,sardars and overseers directly interfered in the relationship in question.

The simplest example is the murder of the sardar in case #28. In this case the woman was unwilling to the end , resisting the sardar's advances until her husband finally killed him. Gill claimed that sardars sometimes had "le droit de seigneur" in the lines.[11] That this was so is implied by the testimony of the Taveuni planter in this case. The planter didn't mention that the woman involved had complained to him about the harassment, as other testimony asserts; nor does he mention that a delegation of five indentured men had come to see him about this and other

transgressions against women by this sardar, as other testimony asserts. Instead the planter noted the complaints of the sardar about the workers, particularly the accused:

> One evening the Sardar told me that [the accused] had threatened him in the field with a knife. He said this man had forbidden him to have anything to do with [his woman]. He said that [the accused] declared he was married to her. [They] are not listed as married in the indenture paper. [12]

The planter claims to have "advised the sardar not to interfere with women," and to have suggested that he give this pair tasks together when "practicable." However, in her testimony the woman claimed that her husband was given larger tasks that all the others, and quite separate from her -- as in the story of Kunti.

In the other two cases, the women involved were apparently participants in the use of official status and power to break their relationships with their men. In both cases the men acted when the leverage of official power had already been brought to bear on them. In both cases their only prospect was further confrontations with official power, loss of the woman and punishment, whatever course of action they chose.

In case #29, the accused killed the woman who had lately began to sleep with the overseer. He had just slapped her for destroying his food, and she was off to file an official complaint against him. This man had already had at least one confrontation with the overseer concerning her. He confessed to the magistrate on the day of arrest:

> All my money has been spent on account of my wife. I saw her two nights at the overseer's house -- when I complained to the overseer he called me a bugger and said that [the woman] wasn't my wife -- she is not my wife she is the wife of [another man on the estate]. The overseer went with her to my room and took £6 away. I told the overseer yesterday that it was a bad thing he had done going with [her] and taking my money. I told him I was used to killing cattle

and I might murder some body.

He goes on to claim that the overseer told him to kill the woman, perhaps to implicate his rival in the crime.

Finally there is case #7, the grisly case in which a husband set out with extraordinary determination to cut off his wife's nose, using his teeth when she grasped away his razor. He also confessed, in a way, to the magistrate:

> [A] and [B] [the two main prosecution witnesses] and [the overseer] ever since I reached this plantation, have given me a great deal of trouble on account of this woman. [A] is cook to [the overseer]. He gave [the overseer] £5 and [the overseer] said "All right if you keep the woman. [The accused] will not get her." On Friday [the overseer] said "[A] you can go to his house and if he assaults you we shall see about it." About 10 or 11 o'clock [A] made a noise inside my house. I began a row and he ran away. That night I was locked up and I do not know where the woman was. The next morning the woman came and gave me half a chapatti. I ate it and went to work.

The man also went on to blame the man A for the crime, but finished with the assertion which strongly suggests that he was in fact guilty, that "I have been married to this woman for 15 years and now she wants to go to another man. I will not let her go as I am married to her."

Why then the assault on her nose? This brings us to the final key to the "outraged sense of justice." When the woman saw her husband coming towards her before the attack, she screamed and ran. Why? Because "he had threatened to kill me or cut my nose off," she testified. Thus when the man assaulted her, he was carrying out the terms of a specific threat -- as was the man in case #29, who warned the overseer that he would murder "some body," and the man in #28, whose threat to the murdered sardar was reported to the court by the planter. Confronted by a plantation system whose mechanisms of violence and control were all directed against them, the coolies' main vehicle for establishing some control

of their own, securing and defending what they wanted, was to make threats and carry them out. Such threats echo through the annals of coolie history.

In sum we can now understand the dynamics of this coolie violence against women and rivals. The coolies had no secure mechanisms for arranging and securing the marriages they needed to make their households. And there was a scarcity of women. While whites from their position of control, and with interests in "feral" novelties, responded to their own demographic imbalance by pursuing women of other races, the Indian men competed among themselves for the same women the whites were freely appropriating. Under these circumstances, as we have seen, there were many successful marriages and families established. But in other cases competition led to beatings and threats, and while overseers and sardars could bully the coolies with impunity, direct counterthreats often landed coolies in prison, or left them paying large fines, bound over to keep the peace. The coolies could not control the sardars and overseers, so they tried to control the women. There may have been a great deal of prostitution in the lines; definitely there were rapes of coolie women by other coolies. The coolie men themselves often accused women of being cold calculators who exhausted one man's wealth and then went on to another. But clearly, many of these women were in fact fleeing from beating to beating, from threat to threat. And when a coolie man was driven to throw his life away in an enormous act of violence, the final trigger to his "outraged sense of justice" was sometimes not only his rejection by the women, but the violation of the terms of specific deals or specific threats he had made to the woman, calling due his response.

Why was the incidence of this type of violence so much higher than direct violence against the system — why was direct violence not equally common? This was so partly because the operators of the system did not understand the dynamics of the relationship-oriented violence, imagining as we have seen that they were observing the natural attributes of "the Indian." Partly, this was also because they did not care as much about relationship-violence — or rather because their attention was always focussed on suppressing the direct labour-related violence. As MY 21 YEARS shows in such accounts as that of the Kabuli Pathans, a very tight rein was kept on the coolies where their labour was concerned. The cases of violence by coolies against other coolies were mainly policed with an eye to keeping them from getting out of hand, not as problems in themselves. [13] The preoccupation of the whites with their own safety, combined with the

suppression of information about white exploitation of coolie women, [14] led to a very interesting variation in the interpretation of coolie violence within the white community. Those like the police inspectors directly involved with the coolie lines realized that the greatest danger the overseers faced was from the husbands of the women they took. Once when Gill was assaulted, the police inspector presumed he had been interfering with the wife or daughter of the coolie who attacked, though Gill claims to have been quite innocent in fact. [15]

The image held by much of the urban white community, after remove from plantation life, was quite different. Consider this 1912 account of cases #28 and #29, published in New Zealand from an interview with the FIJI TIMES editor T.D. Taylor, and then reprinted in the Oct 5, 1912 FIJI TIMES:

> Both murders, committed before Mr. Taylor left the group, were terribly brutal. In the first an Indian employed at Suva was reprimanded by a superior for not having properly carried out his duties. Immediately after the rebuke had been administered, the Indian borrowed his overseer's sharpening stone, whetted his grass-cutting knife, and then cooly severed the overseer's head from his body, after which he carried on with his work. In the second case, an Indian boy was reported to his employer by an Indian girl for improper behaviour. The boy retaliated by hacking the girl to pieces.

The only correct details in the description of the murder of the Taveuni sardar were that the accused borrowed the whetstone first, and that he severed the sardar's head from his body. The second description was much more accurate -- it simply omitted all the relevant details concerning the woman's relationships with the accused and the overseer. FIJI TIMES stories concerning violent crimes tended always to omit reference to sexual involvement of sardars and overseers, and often as here to omit reference to social relationships entirely. The image portrayed was instead of a mysterious race of criminals to whom violence came easily, for any slight, cool enough to return to work after a murder, or to walk undisturbed to the gallows. The New Zealand account explained:

> The fatalism of the Indian, and the belief in reincarnation, is considered by Mr. Taylor to be one reason why crimes of this description so frequently occur.

So it seemed to many urban whites. There was no question of good reasons behind Indian violence, or clear and sufficient motives. Crimes of violence the whites believed, were simply a part of their racial heritage and cultural nature. The main thing then was to keep them under control, and whenever possible to keep them away.

## B. CIVIL LAW -- INDIANS AND EUROPEAN "CIVIL SOCIETY"

To discuss civil law we have to say something about the place of the girmitiyas in the civil society of Fiji in 1912. We will examine (1) the ambiguities and contradictions in the free Indians' legal and social status, (2) the penetration of Indians into the institutions of European civil society, and the roots of the white perception of an "Indian Problem," (3) the white responses to the "Indian Problem" -- codification of privilege, the education test for municipal voting; and (4) The place of civil court in the social structure: home of formal equality for Indians, yet staunchest defender of the forms of European civil order.

(1) Indians as coolies were anticipated by the whites to be willing to accept their natural lowest place in society. Even more than this, they were often considered, not as new colonists of any sort, but as nothing more than labour power alone. On occasion they were reduced to quantities, called "labour units." For instance, their assignments on arrival in 1912 were reported in the FIJI TIMES by numbers only: "Lever's Pacific Plantations, Ltd., Rabi, 10, C.G. Craft, Tuvanita, 12," etc (FT July 18). In coolie cases the death penalty should not be given, the October 15, 1912 FIJI TIMES opined. It was not a deterrent because the coolies were willing to die. But also, the TIMES was against it

> simply and solely on the ground of the insane wastefulness of it all. If a horse -- a draught

> animal, let us say -- contracts vicious habits and bites a piece out of its owner, the owner does not for that reason shoot his horse; nor can we conceive of any human being recommending the pursuit of such a course. Why? Because the draught horse costs money, and cannot be replaced without spending more. If a man falls off a bicycle and breaks his arm, he does not proceed in a fit of revengeful fury to kick the machine into pieces, justifying himself, after it is over, by the most idiotic of excuses, "an eye for an eye." Why? Because a bicycle that can go is worth money, and a heap of twisted metal is not! But if a man -- a useful worker, worth let us say £365 in the year -- in a fit of passion kills another man, his fellow men, with the keenest religious enthusiasm and actuated by the most praiseworthy of motives, solemnly murder him to vindicate that very incompletely defined diathesis called Justice.

Thus in general, and especially where coolies were concerned, the FIJI TIMES of this period believed in applying the logic of profit, and not principles of justice. This orientation towards coolie court cases was repeated in a 1913 news note concerning the planter of Mt. Vernon Estates, Taveuni, who had seven coolies from his plantation awaiting trials on serious charges at one time, and four more off to be witnesses. Rather than express concern that this was a plantation on which there seemed to be a lot of trouble - in 1912 also, a murder case and a rape case originated there -- the newspaper commiserated with the economic situation of the planter. "Mr Harper will lose the services of no less than eleven units of labour for several weeks. He will be in a still worse position if the accused are convicted." When the coolies are judged first of all to be "labour units," then the laws of profit make Mr. Harper the real victim whatever the circumstances of the crimes. Nothing in Fiji ever posed a greater threat to Indians' civil rights than this attitude, this negation of their social identity.

Fortunately for the coolies, their formal legal status was quite at variance from this conception of them as "labour units" -- or else like slaves, coolies would not have had the right to appear in court as complainants, plaintiffs

or defendants at all. Unlike slaves, who would have been property and not citizens, unambiguously, the Indians in Fiji held an ambiguous social status. This ambiguity was deepened by another popular conception, that Indians were citizens but citizens of a foreign territory, India, that most of them would never return to. With that additional complication, the basic ambiguity was as follows. On the one hand, as Chaturvedi, Sanadhya, and other Indian leaders of the time were keen to point out, the Indians were British subjects. But on the other hand, as coolies they began their time in Fiji with an extraordinary number of their rights legally transferred by a single contract, the indenture girmit. By its legal mechanism they had "masters," were largely under the control of the CSR and planters, and were dominated by someone else's interests and will, not their own. This coolie status was the opposite to that valued by European civil society -- the FIJI TIMES, representing those values, had as its motto, "Sworn to no Master, of no Sect am I." The very fact that coolies had agreed to girmit, that they were willing to have masters, were not their own men, made it difficult for Europeans to conceive of the girmitiyas as possible legal equals.

(2) When a coolie's indenture was up he was "free," but even "free" men have social duties in European social theory. They are expected to join in civil society, to contribute to its needs and enjoy its benefits. In Fiji, by the time Indians began to leave girmit, and become "free," civil society as Europeans understood it, with its political and economic systems, laws and courts of justice, was already constituted in Fiji. Indians could not help to design its basic forms. And indeed, although "civil society" was in fact quite young in Fiji, there was rarely any sense -- at this stage of Fiji history -- that Indians might help build it. The concern was instead that what the whites regarded as an intrusion by the lowly coolies might ruin it. This was the "Indian Problem" or "Indian Menace" which by 1912 was already a subject of great public debate in Fiji.

Most civil institutions in Fiji in 1912 were white dominated without question. All judges, lawyers, and assessors involved in courts of justice up to 1912 were whites, or as they called themselves, "Europeans." Justice was served differentially -- a "European" at the Supreme Court level could petition and receive a trial with a full jury instead of a few assessors literally "for the special reason that the accused is a European." (from criminal case #43, 1912). Even death penalty cases involving Indians

were tried before only four assessors or less.

Together with this double standard went a double standard in sentencing. It was big news when, on the 26 September 1912, a white overseer in Navua Magistrate's Court received a prison sentence for his assault on a coolie. Under the headline, "OVERSEER SENTENCED," the FIJI TIMES of September 28 reported:

> ..... The Sub-Inspector of Police, who was prosecuting at the conclusion of the evidence; said that though it was very painful to be obliged to do so, he was compelled to ask His Worship to inflict a severe sentence as the defendant had five previous convictions against him, and an example should be made in this case which would act as a deterrent to others.
>
> His Worship found the defendant guilty and said that labour must be properly treated and sentenced [the overseer] to 14 days hard labour without the option of a fine.

Three weeks later this same court sentenced a coolie to four months hard labour for an assault on another coolie, and much longer sentences than this were common. Yet any jail sentence at all was rare for European managers of coolies. More often, and especially in cases involving overseers raping Indian women, the overseers were simply transferred or sent out of the country. [16] The Europeans had a justification for these practices, and the disparity in sentencing. They -- including Burton and Andrews -- believed that Europeans had to defend their prestige in the eyes of the natives and coolies. This prestige was the prestige of their heritage and social institutions, which they were convinced were the world's greatest, and they joined these abstractions in their concept of prestige with the personal standing of individual Europeans. European law and order was diminished, they felt, when individual Europeans, the representatives of their civilization, were punished publicly for transgressing against it. No such compunction carried over into cases with "native" or "asiatic" defendants. This European defense of prestige and the institutions which were its social basis, and the confusion of these institutions with interests, was the essence of both the "Indian problem" and the problems of

Indians with civil and criminal law.

By 1912 not all European institutions were as insulated as the court. Free Indians were moving into the city in numbers that already dwarfed the white population. Some of them were earning money at quite respectable levels, and even moving into European neighbourhoods. The latter especially provoked occasional problems when acting as if they were equal members of European civil society. A Goanese man (who was never a coolie, and who claimed his true ancestry to be Portugese, but who was thought of by police and press as an Indian) lived off Waimanu Road in Suva. On September 24 1912 in Suva Police Court he sued a white police sub-inspector for assault (case #494). The night before the assault a white neighbour had gone to the man's house to complain about the excessive noise of a party. A fight and some damage had resulted. The sub-inspector came by to retrieve some of the white man's property, which the Goanese held to exchange for repairs, and to ask "why he was causing trouble," the sub-inspector testified. The Goanese claimed that the sub-inspector then said to him, "take your pipe out when talking to a white man," slapped the pipe out of his mouth and made him bleed. The sub-inspector claimed it was the Goanese man who was abusive, blowing smoke in his face, and the court sided with the sub-inspector. The judge "considered the assault, such as it was, justified and was of the opinion that [the Goanese] was fortunate to escape being knocked down." (FT September 26, 1912). The FIJI TIMES agreed, despite the fact that the same week it made several complaints of its own about police arrogance. It wrote about the case,

> There are a certain number of people in this town who seem to imagine that, under cover of our all-protecting law, they can by insolence and insults provoke their superiors to assault them, and then, by visiting a solicitor's office and issuing a summons, further humiliate them by bringing them before a magistrate who will fine them. His Worship's remark that the complainant was fortunate in not being knocked down should make it clear to the gentry we have referred to that even under the British flag, where equal rights of citizenship are given to all, there is a limit to the taunting behavior they can use to an officer of the crown, just as there is a still stricter limit with regard

> to the conduct of such an officer towards a civilian, and it is to be hoped that the lesson contained in the remarks made from the bench on Tuesday will be taken to heart by those whom it concerns. (FIJI TIMES, September 26, 1912)

I have added the emphases in this passage, to enable me to make several points about it. The first thing to note is that the author was taking great pains not to be racist. The issue was not a racial one, he tried to suggest, it was one concerning the improper attitude of a group, not a racial group as a whole but a "gentry." There was no doubt that we as British believed in equal rights for all, but the question was the impact on our laws of these outsiders, with their bad attitude toward their superiors. By conceiving of the problem as a threat to "our" civil society, "we" became the victim no matter what the circumstances. The policeman, provoked into assault, was the true victim even of that assault itself, and when the true perpetrator brought him to court the policeman was "further humiliated." Because he was the victim, the question whether he lived up to the "stricter limit" known to govern his behaviour never had to be dealt with. An alteration had resulted from the penetration of an Indian into a white institution, the Waimanu Road neighbourhood. The perceived need to defend white prestige made the reaction of white public opinion inevitable, regardless of the effort to make a non-racial argument.

(3) The whites of 1912 were not always reticent about making generalizations concerning race. They could make generalizations like that of the FIJI TIMES editorial of April 20, 1912, that even India would never be governed by Indians, "because of an immutable law that the white must always be the dominant race." However, by this time they sought a legal codificiation of privileges for "Europeans" which did not depend on the explicit racial colour-bars that were already under attack in other colonies. For instance, part of the Ba-Sigatoka Light Railways Bill was planned to codify in law something that had always been a tacit part of the Fiji railways run by the CSR -- the existence of a separate special car for whites. As Sanadhya's discussions of ship berths shows, there was growing consciousness of this kind of inequality among the Indians, and time for legal protection of the privilege was at hand. However the codifiers sought to avoid stating a prohibition of non-whites. After discussion, they approved a draft requiring the company

to provide a carriage "reserved for Europeans and any other person who the Company might authorize to use it, and the fine was made applicable to unauthorized people who travelled in such compartment." (FIJI TIMES, December 21, 1912). While in this example the fact of company management allowed "authorization" to be used as the cover for a colour-bar, in most other cases the rhetoric employed concerned "citizenship."

By 1912 the idea had grown current that the real problem behind the "Indian Problem" was one of citizenship, citizenship in the sense of consciousness of rights and civic duties, and participation in civic affairs. The problem with Indians, Europeans thought, was that they exploited society (meaning European Civil Society) but made no contribution to it. Within the European community there was controversy over the substance of this problem -- not concerning the reasons why Indians had not already joined fully into civil society, but rather with regard to whether they would ever be capable of it, or should be allowed. The debate over the capacity of Indians for advancement, and the desirability of that advancement, was raised especially in connection with questions about Indian education, and its terms are revealed in the testimony before the Education Commission of 1909.

Some whites believed that because they were a low "class" of Indians, or because of their racial nature in general, the Indians in Fiji were incapable of being proper citizens. Some believed that they should only be thought of as "citizens" of India. W.A. Scott's report to the Commission reflected both of these views:

> I am not in sympathy with teaching Indians English. I consider the class of Indians in this colony to be agriculturalists, and I think they should be confined as much as possible to that sphere of usefulness. If any of them desire an academic training there are liberal and ample means for their acquiring it in their own country. (p.65)

However other witnesses believed that proper citizenship (or at least what Rev. Richard Piper called "a trustworthy Indian") was possible and desirable, and that education could produce one -- by completely transforming the Indian's social nature. Brother Claudius of Marist Brothers School, a school already endeavoring to produce "trustworthy Indians," reported

that

> The Indian with a good moral education can be turned into a very serviceable citizen ... through education they lose almost entirely their backward national spirit and replace it, willingly, by a good English spirit. (p.53)

Rev. Piper agreed, but with trepidation:

> the primary object of educating Indians will be to make them better citizens and reduce their average of criminality which, at present, is alarmingly high. The danger is that of all education a purely secular one will place sharper and more formidable weapons in the hands of those whose moral and religious sanctions are lamentably weak, but whose predilections to theft, deceit, duplicity, conspiracy, rapine and murder are terribly real and strong. (p.66)

To solve that problem this Methodist missionary wanted, naturally enough, to make all the Indians Christians. Other whites were quite sceptical of placing so much faith in their faith. For instance, E.W. Fenner, CSR Manager in Fiji at the time, opined to the Commission that "a coolie who speaks English and professes Christianity is generally worth watching" (p.91). But despite such differences, there was wide agreement that there was a "problem," that the clever but criminal urban coolie was a civic threat. In 1912 white racial interest and civil ideology came together to arrange a new defense against this Indian menace: the education test for qualifying to vote in municipal elections.

In 1912, just as the Fiji Indians were beginning to become aware of their legal and social position as a resident community in Fiji, they were confronted by a new restriction of their civil rights. Complex negotiations between the Government and the Suva Municipal Council resulted in 1912 in the Council passing and forwarding to the Governor a provision for a new franchise requirement, a test in reading, writing and speaking English. The test was originally to be applicable to "alien voters" only, but in later versions, the law was made applicable generally in principle, to be applied in practice at the discretion of the Mayor. This form of the measure finally became law, despite protests

from Indians and India. Among the protesters were Chaturvedi and Sanadhya in MY 21 YEARS. At this time educational institutions teaching English to Indians were still very few. Thus the law was effectively an exclusion of Indians from municipal franchise, their only franchise in Fiji. MY 21 YEARS was bitter: "Will the Indians come out from the womb speaking English?"

Of course, the legislators were not concerned for Indians and their rights when they devised this measure, but rather about defending their civil society. For instance, Maynard Hedstrom, an elected representative, announced in debate that he had once been offered Indian votes for money.

> It is well known that in our midst we have a large number of ratepayers who cannot read or write their own language, and who have absolutely no knowledge of municipal affairs. The vote in the hands of the people who have no idea what it is, and how they ought to use it, is a real danger to the community. If an education test were enforced ... There would be an end to the "40 votes for 1s each" business. [my emphases] (FIJI TIMES November 23, 1912)

"The community" was "our" community, and the problem with Indians was that they had no knowledge of it, were not part of it. Thus they were to have their political rights denied until they had educated themselves into the proper forms of practice. Fairness towards them was besides the point, because "our" concern was with the greater good of "the community" as a whole. The FIJI TIMES made this last argument quite literally, in an editoral defending the earlier version of the law applicable to "aliens" only:

> It is just as well that his motion was not amended to apply to whites. It is, as Cr. Johnson suggested, establishing a most dangerous precedent to put illiterate black on the same level as the illiterate white, especially in cases where the formers's conception of the duties of citizenship is so very vague as is that of the great majority of local coloured voters ... it is anything but elevating that a white man of repute should, in a council election, have to stand or fall by the

> chance vote of electors who, at the bidding of any Babu, would vote "Brown sahib" or "Jones Sahib," just as their memory served them. We congratulate Cr. Scott on having brought this important matter forward, and trust that his colleagues on the Legislative Council will sufficiently emphasize the matter as to impress the Colonial Office with the need for an alteration in the law. That this conviction will take a lot of pressing home we know, but the day has arrived when the progress of this town demands that legislation shall not be in the interest of one class or race. [my emphasis] (September 7, 1912)

Thus is articulated the view that the education test was not in a racial interest, despite the fact that it excluded one group in favour of another. Note that the fear was not of Indian domination, but rather that Indian votes would spoil the European elections. In 1912 European power was very secure. It was usually supposed even that only white candidates were of sufficient caliber to stand. The one Chinese already elected to Suva Council by "Asiatic" votes was held to ridicule as proof, not that Asians could actually come to dominate civil politics, but that Asian voters were capable of any level of nonsense. [17]

A typical understanding of the evil of racism is that it elevates interest, the interest of one racial group, over moral principle. However, in order to understand the racism of colonial civil society, in Fiji and elsewhere, we have to grasp the colonial ideology in which these terms were reversed: action in white racial interest seeming to be based on principle, agitation for eqality to be based on non-white interests. The leaders of the colonial whites were aware of the tensions between equal rights doctrines and the legal and social privileges for whites which they sought to defend and elaborate. But by and large they truly believed that they were bringing higher principles to bear as they acted. Consider the way the matter of the Indians' rights to representation was finally directly addressed, in the November 5, 1912 FIJI TIMES editorial:

> To those who delight to cry "Where there is taxation there must be representation" we would point out that even if the educational test becomes law there will be due representation for the people

> it bars from voting, in the persons who are elected, by the educated portion of the community, to safeguard the best interest of the town; and that it is one of the elementary rules of civilization that the educated and enlighted shall represent, lead, and govern for the uneducated and entirely ignorant, in all matters requiring thought and intelligence.

The "elementary rules of civilization" may have seemed quite relevant to the white leaders of the time precisely because they felt themselves to be in the elementary stages of creating a proper civilization in Fiji. Their use and control of "natives" and "Asiatics" were only a part of that vast project. For the Indians there was thus another reversal. "Civil society" is in its own terms a means, with the needs and interests of the citizens as its end. However the Indians were only in Fiji as a means of creating and sustaining the economic basis of that civil society. The paternalistic justification for their use was that they were "entirely ignorant," incapable of doing any better for themselves. Europeans believed that "citizenship" and civil society as they knew it were unique developments of their advanced European "civilization," and thus that natives and coolies were not deprived of any "citizenship" by their colonial domination and use. Instead the exposure and participation in European society could only do them good -- perhaps even make them citizens themselves one day, though we have seen the arguments over whether that was possible. The point for us here, our final point about "civil society" as the Europeans had constructed it in Fiji, is that there is a great gap between "citizenship," the final end, and Indians as coolies, the means of supporting civil society, itself only a means serving the "citizens." This gap was a historical problem. It defined a very wide terrain for the "free" Indians to cross, and it was a journey that white society was not altogether sure it wanted them to make. The Indian quest for social respect and equality in Fiji was a journey that would take all of Fiji's colonial history. But 1912 was only the beginning, and not even the problems were then entirely clear.

(4) Totaram Sanadhya and Benarsidas Chaturvedi were aware of the great mystification of the status of Indians, aware of the gap between their legal status as "free" British subjects and full and equal social rights. As they say at the end of their discussion of colour-bars and racism, "We

people, who consider ourselves subjects of the British Empire, are treated like this when we have left our homes in India. Then we open our eyes." But not all of their countrymen were so awakened, and the officers of the European courts were perhaps least aware of all.

For Indians the civil court was a paradox. In the eyes of the civil court the most important thing about Indians was their formally free status, their formal equality, their power as free agents to make contracts and sign agreements. But this was the one place where the granting of such a full measure of equality was not necessarily a benefit. The court held Indians responsible to know, be aware of and obey the law, and to meet all the duties they contracted for. As the defender of the laws of civil society the court could not concern itself, or at least, did not concern itself, with the substance of agreements and the context of arrangements. The court was the final bastion of the order of civil society. To protect civil order from corruption it applied the law, the legal forms, in their purity. In 1912, this orientation of the civil court bore many bitter fruit for the Fiji Indians.

## C. INDIANS IN CIVIL COURT

About civil cases I have no useful statistics. But the available records on many particular cases are very rich. Therefore let us simply review a few cases, and learn from them.

In MY 21 YEARS the story is told of a confrontation between a group of Punjabis and a European lawyer named Berkeley -- but the account there makes several critical mistakes. The barrister Humphrey Berkeley did in 1912 take £25 each from 46 Punjabis who wanted to go to the Argentine Republic. He was brought to court and ordered to make a refund. The Punjabis were definitely cheated of their money by legal devices and connivances. But the rest of the facts as recorded in the court notebook and the FIJI TIMES (March to June, 1912) do not match the details cited in MY 21 YEARS. According to those records and accounts, what happened was as follows.

In 1911 some Punjabi men set off from the Punjab for "the Argentine." Said their leader, Armah Singh, in court: "I heard about the Argentine in my own country. I came to

Fiji because I thought it was the same as the Argentine. I don't know where the Argentine is." When they learned that Fiji was not the Argentine they determined to go on. They were not indentured and had some money, and were advised to go to see Humphrey Berkeley. Berkeley was a leading barrister, who was brought to the Supreme Court six times as a defendant in civil cases from 1901 to 1912, five times for non-payment of debt, and once for fraudulent misrepresentation. He was never a plaintiff there, and almost always a loser. He lost all his debt cases (perhaps simply forcing court actions in order to delay payments) and settled the fraud case with a series of payments before the court case reached a final determination. He was also, in 1912, a very sick man, who was hospitalized before his legal battle with the Punjabis was complete, and who died long before matters were resolved for them.

What Berkeley did or did not promise the Punjabis was in dispute in the court testimony. It was likely that in part there was failure to communicate between Berkeley and the Punjabis. In many other court cases of the time there were complaints about the inability of the professional court translators to comprehend the testimony of Punjabi policemen, and barristers simply relied on their own clerks or whoever they could find to do their translating for them. But beyond the language barriers there were many profound divergences of claim. Most importantly, the Punjabis asserted that they always had intended to go to the Argentine, and had been promised passage there by Berkeley. Berkeley and his translators swore that they made it clear to the Punjabis that going to the Argentine was impossible, and that they were trying to arrange some other kind of voyage for the Punjabis, to San Francisco, Portland, Panama, Tonga or the New Hebrides -- "any free country" that would have them.

What is clear is that in January 1912 Berkeley began accepting £25 each from the Punjabis. He had a plan -- he would use the money to buy and refit an old ship, the "Clansman," which was for sale in the harbour, a boat now unwanted with the end of Polynesian labour recruiting. He would give the boat to captain, crew, and ship's doctor in lieu of wages at the end of the voyage, and thus keep as profit for himself whatever was left after outfitting the boat. Berkeley further decided on an arbitrary £3 3s fee for himself for each passage, did his mathematics, and told the Punjabis to pay him the £25 each, and that he required there to be fifty of them in order for passage to be arranged.

Armah Singh was the first to pay his £25, and then he and others recruited among local Punjabis for the extra men needed to reach the total of fifty. Ten men were recruited in Ba, and Punjabi money and Punjabis began to fill Berkeley's office. When he had gathered enough money Berkeley bought the ship for £400 and had the refitting begun. He claimed in court that the Punjabis knew all about the plan; they claimed simply to have paid for passage. Once a total of £1110 was in Berkeley's hands, a leaving date was set. Said one of the Punjabis in court:

> On the 20th I went to Mr. Berkeley's house with all my belongings, but went on board no ship.... I know that Armah Singh got another piece of paper from Mr. Berkeley. It stated that it promised to take us on board on the 15th, I don't know of what month. No vessel was ready on that day. [from FT]

Berkeley's side of the story was that the Punjabis were crowding his office, and then when he got sick, pestering him at home. Finally he promised tham a sailing date of March 15. He said, "The letter stating the date and sailing was written to get rid of the Punjabis when I was ill -- [an aide] supplied the date. I wrote that if the ship did not sail on or about March 15 the money would be returned."

What Berkeley had not reckoned on was that the ship inspection of the Harbour Master was much stricter for ships going on longer voyages. What was acceptable for an old ship making runs to the Solomons was not acceptable for a ship intending to cross the entire Pacific. The ship was in such pathetic shape that each inspection found expensive new problems, and things reached a point where Berkeley would have had to spend some of his £3 3s a head profit (which he had calculated and extracted from the £1110 on the basis of 50 paid fares although there were only 46 to travel) in order to make the ship ready. There work stopped and March 15 soon passed.

The Punjabis complained to the Agent-General for Immigration and to the Colonial Secretary -- they later, after Berkeley's death, even raised money to send Armah Singh to argue their case before the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. On March 29 Berkeley was again a defendant in court, not the Supreme Court but Suva Police Court, sued by

W.H. Brabant, Chief Inspector of Customs at Suva, on behalf of "one Armah Singh, a Punjabi," for £25 and £10 compensation. Intense battles followed over jurisdiction, wording of the complaint and the interpretation of section 328 of the Merchant's Shipping Act, the last being the licence for Brabant to bring suit, on instructions from the government. Berkeley and his lawyers used every device they could to dodge the suit by challenging it on technical grounds, throughout the proceedings. However at the end of the trial the Judge found against Berkeley, and ordered the £25 refunded and an additional £5 to be paid as compensation.

Unfortunately for the Punjabis, Berkeley appealed. On May 21 Berkeley entered the hospital, on May 29 an appeal on ten grounds was heard on his behalf by the Supreme Court, and on June 12 he died. But before he died he won. On June 1, for the only time this century , Berkeley won as a defendant in the Fiji Supreme Court. The Chief Justice ruled that the Punjabi Armah Singh, and by implication all the Punjabis, were not owed a refund because they had no specific contract with Berkeley, in particular no contract for a voyage to the Argentine. The Judge ruled that Berkeley had simply promised to do his best to find them a passage, but was not a "passage broker, or as it might be termed, an emmigration runner." (from FT.) Critical to this decision was the way the judge resolved the conflict in testimony about planned and promised destinations, and leaving dates. He resolved it with reference to a document, not to the letter Berkeley wrote while sick, but the receipt given by Berkeley to the Punjabi. The receipt noted that Berkeley was paid £25 (not, as Sanadhya and Chaturvedi asserted, only £16) but it did not state that Berkeley promised to provide passage to the Argentine. Thus, the Judge ruled, there was no contract for this specific performance, and thus Berkeley had not broken any contract. The decision of the lower court was reversed with costs.

The Punjabis did, finally, reach the Argentine. On June 6, 1912 the government was already considering a plan to sell the Clansman and give them the proceeds -- after paying the liabilities on the vessel. By December 13 the Punjabis had received this money amounting to 5 shillings per pound originally spent (i.e. 25%), and they left that day for the Argentine via Wellington. Prior to their departure a warning was given to them, and to Indians generally, that according to the Secretary of State for India, who had made inquiries, there was little hope for employment in the Argentine. But the Punjabis were apparently willing to take the risk. On January 23, 1913, Mr. J.J. Davies returned from having escorted

the Punjabis as far as Wellington. He reported the amount of their savings, which he had held for them until they sailed for Buenos Aires -- £2700 in gold. Supposing these savings to be earnings made in Fiji, the FIJI TIMES of that day noted, "what possibilities there seem to be in this country for Indians." Davies added that "the men went without giving any trouble whatever."

The case of Humphrey Berkeley and the Punjabis, or as it was known at the time, "the Clansman affair," well illustrates two general themes to Indians' problems in civil courts in 1912. The first, here in extreme form, was ignorance -- ignorance of the legal forms and formulae necessary to protect one's self in contractural arrangements, and ignorance of the forms of Western culture in general. The Punjabis, with only one exception, could not speak any English. They did not know the names of the months, or even where the Argentine was. Legal documents were all "pieces of paper," with promises written on them that the Punjabis could not read, but remembered from translated verbal explanations. Indian testimony in civil cases in general abounded in references to "pieces of paper," which could be contracts, leases, wills, warrants, simple letters, or nothing relevant to their business at all. The promises remembered in connection with them only occasionally matched their written content.

MY 21 YEARS itself shared this inability to penetrate the complex network of written vehicles for agreements under European civil law. Thus we are told the story of Banner Sahab making promises about land and writing them on "pieces of paper." We are told in the account of the Punjabi story that Berkeley tricked them into giving bail money, which he did not do, and that the Punjabis could not collect on their "decree" because Berkeley had transferred his wealth to his son, when in fact they had lost their "decree" on appeal. The Punjabis may have received their settlement (which the FIJI TIMES called a "dividend") from Berkeley's son, another barrister who may have inherited his father's estate, and this could have confused Sanadhya's memory of the case. But in general, his details were the least reliable and at the same time, his explanations the vaguest, when he entered these domains of civil law. In comparison, his story of the violent conflict of the Kabuli Pathans and police -- from their complaints over food and terms of work to the shots fired, injuries and their dispersal of different estates -- matches in every essential detail the official account in the Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1907. The interesting thing about his version of the Punjabi story is that while the facts

are wrong their implications are right. This brings us to the second theme.

Berkeley exploited the Punjabis, willfully took advantage of their ignorance, and used his knowledge of the law to arrange their legal relationship all to his own advantage. He left them without legal protections and showed no concern for their interests. It was no accident that the critical documents were written so that they did not bind him to any specific performances, nor that he was holding his full payment and extracting his profit before he had delivered any service -- indeed in a way that made it unnecessary for him to deliver the service. Speaking for the Punjabis' side in court, H.M. Scott had to try to salvage the case from ridicule of the Punjabi's confused testimony. He argued,

> Much has been said as to the Punjabi's evidence. I would only point out what has been the touble. The trouble has been that the defendant never wrote anything definite on the receipts when he received the money. I only wish to remark that we have it conclusively in evidence that a man of learning, the defendant, has received £1110 from a lot of Punjabis and we have nothing to show what it was paid for. [quoted in FIJI TIMES April 13, 1912]

In his anger at his colleague's manipulation of the law, Scott was in fact merely highlighting Berkeley's best formal defense. Time and again in 1912, Indians would come to court with stories and with papers, and invariably it was the formal legal terms of the contracts, leases, and so forth involved that determined their fate, documents which were beyond their skills to manage. Civil law is in theory written to reflect principles of general equity; but once written, its own formal code supercedes such general moral considerations. This is the "rule of law," a formidable weapon against the ignorant in all societies. In Fiji it was frequently manipulated to exploit the free Indians, in ways another case will also show. I was not able to trace the case of "Banner" or "Biner," and determine whether he gave his 200 Indians leases or if and how he broke those leases. However another lease conflict between an Indian and a European received as much newspaper space in 1912 as any other court action of that year -- Yusuf vs. Spaeth, in the Supreme Court.

Yusuf worked at the mill at Labasa. His brother, Sahim,

had worked for "Mr. Spaeth" for twenty years, for the most part as a sardar. (Court records and newspaper accounts always gave whites, but not Indians, the honorific "Mr." But note that the titles of the cases did not, reflecting the formal equality of the court.) In 1905, Spaeth says, (Yusuf said it was 1903 or 1904), Spaeth made Sahim manager of Qaranigola, a copra plantation in Dreketi, Vanualevu. The FIJI TIMES of December 3, 1912, reported Spaeth's testimony on the subject:

> He told Sahim that as he had been a good servant he should have the benefits of the lease. As long as he paid rent and performed the covenants he could take the copra made on the estate, but he held it entirely on condition that when witness came back he would hand it over to him.

There are two interesting things about this agreement. One is that there was no written document to specify it, and the other is that Yusuf claimed never to have heard of it. Spaeth had two leases for Qarangola, the former up to 1909 and the latter for 1909 to 1914, both leases dated June 19, 1903. However Yusuf also had a lease, dated 1909, stating that Sahim was the lessee.

In late 1911 Sahim drowned, and Yusuf went to a European lawyer in Suva, Robert Crompton, to take out probate. Crompton sent him back to inventory his brother's possessions with the help of a white man, Mr. Lynch. Sahim had also run a store at Koronicagi, near Qaranigola, and Spaeth met Yusuf there on December 27, 1911. Spaeth claimed to Yusuf that he had been sent by Mr. Crompton to do an inventory, but Yusuf disputed this. Then Spaeth offered to go into partnership with Yusuf for Qaranigola and Yusuf refused. The next day Yusuf was called by Sahim's old employees to Qaranigola, where he found Spaeth on the verandah of Sahim's house. The Indian witnesses agreed on what happened next, and the court eventually accepted their account. Yusuf tried to enter the house, Spaeth slapped him, took the key, and shoved him off the porch by the scruff of the neck. Spaeth declared that the plantation was his, that Yusuf should clear out, and that if Yusuf came back Spaeth would get the Buli Dreketi and the local Fijians to tie him up and beat him.

Yusuf "did not report the assault to anyone," he said in court, because "the magistrate doesn't listen to him."

(FT Nov 30, 1912). Instead he went to Suva and told his lawyer, Crompton, that Spaeth had assaulted him and confiscated his property. Yusuf asked Crompton to get his property back, and Crompton said to wait until Spaeth came to Suva.

In MY 21 YEARS it was argued that "If there is any conflict between an Indian and a white person there, then usually the white barrister will take the money from the Indian to fight his case, and then in trial take the side of the white." This happened, literally, to Yusuf. After Spaeth arrived in Suva, Crompton substantively abandoned his role as Yusuf's representative. In the trial to come, Crompton was the lawyer for Spaeth, and all the whites involved with the case and its "pieces of paper" -- Spaeth, Garrick, and Scott -- appeared as witnesses for Spaeth, against Yusuf. Yusuf had to hire another lawyer, Dr. Brough, to defend his interests. But before that, much more had transpired.

When Spaeth arrived in Suva Crompton, who had seen Sahim's lease, told Spaeth that Yusuf was entitled to Sahim's property. Spaeth replied that he was himself the real lessee of Qaranigola. Crompton and Spaeth then went to see Mr. Scott, trustee of Garrick's Estates, the owners of Qaranigola. On their return, Crompton told Yusuf to take his other papers but to leave his lease with Crompton, so that Crompton could show it to Mr. Scott and discuss it. If he went back to Qaranigola, he was to take nothing away from there but his own clothing. Yusuf gave Crompton his lease, and went back to Qaranigola.

Yusuf lived at Qaranigola for one month, then after he was gone for a day he returned to find his possessions in boxes on the verandah and the door locked with a new lock. He was confronted by a "Mr. Weere," who claimed to be in charge of the estate. However Mr. Weere, who also appeared against Yusuf in court, agreed that day that Yusuf had rights to the land after reading Yusuf's probate, from Crompton. Thus Yusuf gained another month's residence. Then one day Spaeth arrived, accompanied by an Indian constable. Spaeth claimed in his later testimony that on this day he and Yusuf agreed to await Mr. Garrick's return to Fiji to settle the matter for good, and to put Qaranigola under Spaeth's trust in the meantime. He claimed that Yusuf left Qaranigola of his own free will. Yusuf's version, which was again supported by the Indian witnesses, was that the constable announced that the Magistrate and Inspector in Labasa had authorized him to put Yusuf off the land. Yusuf refused to go, and the constable told him that if he did not go, the constable had an order from the

Magistrate to instruct the Fijians to tie him up. The constable then went into the house to inventory Yusuf's goods, and when Yusuf tried to follow him Spaeth again grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. Spaeth told Yusuf to leave and further threatened that if he ever came back to Dreketi, "people" would beat him.

Yusuf went to Suva, hired Dr. Brough, and they arranged and presented his case in court. The most critical matter was Sahim's lease. Sahim went to see Mr. Garrick, owner of the estate, in 1907 because the rent was in arrears. Garrick was angry about the rent -- but it had all been paid from Sahim to Spaeth, who, it was alleged, though he denied it, never forwarded the money to Garrick. From 1907 to 1911, Sahim paid his rent directly to Garrick. According to testimony of Indians who accompanied Sahim on his dealings with Garrick, at some point in the following two years Garrick offered to transfer the lease to Sahim in exchange for three years rent, i.e. £45. The Indian witnesses reported seeing Sahim pay Garrick the money, and Garrick saying, "the land is yours." (FT Nov 30,1912). Garrick also took occasion to raise the rent, to £20 a year, which was paid by Sahim in advance, as Garrick and his accountants admitted, for every year after including 1912.

Garrick in his testimony admitted signing a lease, giving it to Sahim and raising the rent. He denied receiving the £45, however. While the Indians claimed he promised to register the lease in a few days, he claimed that he only wrote the lease to secure rights in the estate for Sahim if Spaeth could be convinced to give up his lease. In any case all agreed that Garrick visited Qaranigola in August 1909. An Indian witness, Abdul Azziz, claimed that at this time, "Sahim complained that his lease was not a formal one. Mr. Garrick promised to give him a registered lease when he went to Suva, Sahim gave him £2 10s for the registration fee." (FT Nov 30 1912). Garrick claimed that he tried to get Spaeth to give up his lease, and that Spaeth refused. He did not explain the basis on which he raised the rent.

The lease was never registered. In November 1912 the case was tried. Yusuf did not sue for the lease, or for the right to live on Qaranigola, but simply for property he had left behind, including a horse and four bulls, and the value of materials Sahim had used to build new buildings and fences on the estate. He also sued for damages from the assaults.

The court reserved judgement for two months, and then

on February 1, 1913 found for Spaeth on almost every point. The Chief Justice based his judgement on the verbal contract between Spaeth and Sahim, accepting Spaeth's and other Europeans' accounts of it -- a "tenancy at will." No agreement of Sahim and Garrick could affect this contract, he ruled. He dismissed Sahim's lease in a single sentence: "In 1909 when a certain weird document was given to Sahim by Mr Garrick the trustees had no estate to assign." (FT Feb 1, 1913) The judge also accepted Spaeth's testimony on another subject, that Sahim took over a going concern in 1905, and did not, as the Indians claimed, build the plantation from close to nothing in 1903. The improvements were Sahim's own risk and Yusuf could claim nothing for them. Finally, the judge found that he had nothing to rule on with regard to the horse and the bulls. When after the second assault Yusuf had sent an Indian to get his brother's bulls back from Spaeth, Spaeth was abusive and refused to give them up. However in his testimony Spaeth admitted they were Yusuf's property, and that he had merely borrowed them. The Chief Justice noted this, without ordering their return, before going on to consider the horse. The horse had been saddled and bridled on command of Spaeth at the occasion of one of the assaults on Yusuf, and Spaeth later rode off on it. Yusuf's workers testified that they followed the command to provide the horse out of fear. The Chief Justice simply noted that he again accepted Spaeth's account -- "With regard to the horse he said he borrowed one, the saddle and the bridle he borrowed, they are not now on the estate and he did not know what had become of them." (FT Feb 1, 1913). Again, there was no order for their return or for recompense for their value.

Only with respect to the assault did Yusuf win "a technical verdict, and only technical." The judge began by noting that since the lease was in fact held by Spaeth, even Sahim's old servants had no right to be on the propery. As for Yusuf, "It is a matter to enquire what is his position as an individual. He had none." Nevertheless, Spaeth had used unnecessary force, and thus Spaeth was instructed to pay Yusuf £10. This was all that Yusuf won out of his entire list of claims, and since the defendant was awarded costs for the vast majority of the court action, Yusuf must have owed Spaeth far more that he was awarded.

Thus Garrick got paid an extra 25% a year, at least, and perhaps a flat £45 as well, for a valueless lease, a "weird document" no European with good sense would have stood for. Most likely, he truly intended to get Spaeth

to give up his lease, just as Berkeley had indeed planned to get the Punjabis to the Argentine, or at least to Tonga for their money. But like Berkeley, Garrick arranged to receive his money first, in exchange for the valueless "paper," before he set out to perform the service of real value, and again like Berkeley he was guaranteed his money whether he performed the service or not. Spaeth also was sitting on free money, in the form of the plantation he faced no liabilities for, yet could claim whenever its prospects made it convenient. He had the help of both the European law and his friend the Buli Dreketi, who was said in court to have been very angry when informed that Sahim and not Spaeth had been granted the lease by Garrick. Yusuf was not even granted any of the 1912 copra harvest, despite the fact that his brother paid the 1912 rent, and his brother's employees had gathered some of it, and had been tending the estate for six years. What copra had not already been removed from the plantation went to Spaeth, because the copra-producing trees predated Sahim's residence. The copra was thus viewed as part of what Spaeth held with the lease.

Civil law was not difficult to manipulate against people who viewed documents as pieces of paper. But further, it was especially easy to manipulate when one had the monopoly, before court, of mechanisms to enforce one's claims. Europeans did not, by and large, appear in court complaining that Indians had seized their property, run them off their land, or threatened them with beatings by local Fijians. Europeans could mobilize local police and magistrates to act on their assertions of rights much faster than Indians could. And finally, even in court Europeans had an extraordinary advantage in skills in delivering effective testimony. Quite apart from issues of simple racial bias, which were obviously likely to play a role in all-white courts, the Indians had to speak through translators and speak about details whose legal implications they did not always fully grasp. The whites on the other hand "spoke the same language" as the judge and assessors, both literally and in terms of presuppositions. Indians were notorious for being "unreliable" witnesses, who exaggerated facts and entered completely fanciful claims among their legitimate ones. Many girmitiyas seem indeed to have done this, probably not comprehending the damage it did to the claims that were accurate. But in any case most Indian witnesses had difficulty in presenting relevant evidence, and having it believed. In conflicts of testimony, it was very rare for a judge to take the word of an Indian over that of

a European.

We have discussed Indian incomprehensions and white manipulations of the civil law against Indians. There were of course other problems Indians faced with civil law -- for instance, the compexities that arose when European courts tried to resolve disputes over Indian marriages, and bring principles of European civil society to bear on Indian social forms (see for instance Ramjan vs Panchamdass and Etwari, #5 in 1912). We have not the space to consider the social complexities here -- let us only note that the Europeans changed Indian marriage from a gift into a contract, but allowed it, strangely enough, to be a contract between the parents rather than the husband and wife.

The only other matter we should consider with detail is a final development of the themes we have already discussed. Not only did Europeans, like Berkeley, Spaeth, and Garrick, manipulate contract law to their advantage in dealing with Indians. Some Europeans, including barristers themselves, actually wrote contracts they knew to be illegal, in order to bully mystified Indians into taking courses of action desired.

Here are two examples of these contracts, the first dealing with indenture girmits, the second with marriages. The former was part of Mariyaye and Lachmaia vs. G.H.W. Moore, civil case #19 of 1912 in the Supreme Court. Lachmaia was Moore's sardar, and was under girmit on Moore's plantation. Because a store was needed on the plantation and because Mariyaye, Lachmaia's wife, was injured, Moore commuted her indenture and she ran a store on the plantation. Moore provided a room for the store in the lines and store accounts were opened in Moore's name but, the Indians alleged, they paid back all their starting credit and ran their accounts themselves. When a law was passed forbidding sardars from operating stores in the lines, they opened another store just outside the plantation. Moore was out of the country, and on his return, was unhappy with arrangements. He had sued Mariyaye, claiming that a sewing machine she bought with store profits was his property, and he lost. Now, because they had opened another store without his permission, or involvement, he closed and locked their store in the lines, and confiscated all the goods and money there. According to Lachmaia, he said, "Your wife is abusing me; you don't obey me; I am going to fix you." The Indians filed suit for the return of their goods and the money, some £70. Then came a very interesting meeting at Moore's

house.

According to Lachmaia, Moore offered to cancel Lachmaia's indenture, which had little time left to run in any case, and to give back their confiscated goods and money, if they would sign an agreement withdrawing their legal action against him. Another European who did not speak Hindi was present, and to his guidance Lachmaia and Mariyaye signed a contract written in English, a contract which waived their rights to the goods rather than specifying the good's return. Moore did cancel Lachmaia's indenture, but two weeks later, Lachmaia said, disavowed the promise to return the goods, and told him that the agreement he had signed had waived his rights to sue for them. In his own testimony Moore claims that Lachmaia had signed the agreement with this understanding. He admitted having Lachmaia sign the agreement.

The agreement Lachmaia signed was patently illegal, and could not restrict his right to sue. However the judge ruled against Lachmaia and Mariyaye on other grounds -- the "corrupt" evidence of many of their witnesses, their failure to prove their case concerning what was taken from the store, and ambiguities in the store accounts and the nature of their partnership with Mr. Moore. This verdict and the store contracts need not concern us, however. The point is not only that Moore, like Spaeth, siezed what he claimed and left all ambiguity to work against the Indians. The point is that he wrote an illegal contract, and, whether or not he misrepresented it to the Indians, tried to get them to believe that they had signed away rights which were legally theirs. He tried to use a piece of paper and the promise of "free" status to try to secure his hold of store profits which his previous legal action -- the sewing machine suit -- had failed to deliver.

In another case, the European had an Indian sign away illegally his marriage to his wife. On January 16, 1912, the FIJI TIMES reported a Suva Police Court case which involved a wife who had fled from her husband to another man. The man went to R.Berkeley, Humphrey Berkeley's son, also a barrister, signed a contract devised by Berkeley and paid a fee for it. The contract read in English that the man waived rights to his wife in exchange for the return to him of the wedding jewellery. Such a contract was, of course, again patently illegal. When his wife did not return the man went to another barrister and eventually claimed in court to have been misled by Berkeley's clerks

about the terms of the contract he signed. Berkeley, representing the wife and her new man, claimed to have explained the terms of the contract accurately. Despite the fact that the contract was illegal, the judge accepted Berkeleys's contentions concerning it, and allowed it as evidence of permission sufficient to prevent a conviction of the wife's new man for "harbouring another man's wife." However he also instructed her to return to her true husband.

An Indian who had signed a disadvantageous contract could try to manipulate circumstances to his own benefit, and claim in court that he never understood the terms of the document he signed. However I know of no case in which such a claim ever gained a girmitiya anything in the civil courts of Fiji. Instead the "piece of paper" always retained its compelling force, except where it was itself actually a connivance, the token of an attempt to use the mystique of legal forms to construct a restraint quite beyond the terms of law. The illegal contracts were not binding -- but there was no disadvantageous consequences to the Europeans who were revealed to have written them. They could even be used in court as evidence of intent. Finally, the connivances only failed when they were actually examined in court -- but they only seem to appear in court when defendants claim to have been misled, as well, about the true contents when they signed them. It is likely that there were many more illegal contracts that did the trick they were intended to, signed by men and women who correctly understood the terms, but did not know their own rights.

## D. INDIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE COURTS AND GOVERNEMNT -- 1912 AND BEYOND

It is interesting to note that while Sanadhya and Chaturvedi were very willing to criticize the structure of laws, the forms of contracts, and the motives and performances of lawyers, they seldom attacked the judges. Exceptions are the comments about the magistrate in India who checked 165 indenture girmits in 30 minutes, and, following Burton, criticism of the educational qualifications of magistrates in Fiji. But in general, it was the lawyers and not the judges who were blamed for Indians problems in court. In the same way, the higher the official in

the government hierarchy, the more likely he was to receive praise, including most notably the Governor.

In these two trends MY 21 YEARS seems again to reflect the general sentiments of the Fiji Indians of the day. Consider for instance the following account of a retiring magistrate's final day:

> On that afternoon the whole of the free Indian settlers came to the Court House in gala dress bringing tea, biscuits, fruit, cigars, ginger-beer, sweet-meats and all sorts of things which they presented to me, together with a plated tea and coffee service, and a silver manicure set for my wife. I took it as a very great tribute of their affection as I was leaving them for good, and they could have no hope of any favour from me in the future. [18]

There was a cultural basis to this respect and affection, a basis revealed by a Hindi free translation to be found in another Hindi language book, FIJI DIGDARSHAN, published in 1937. The book's author, a Sanatani missionary who spent many years in Fiji, translated a judge's decision into Hindi, and at one point the judge declared his own conception of his duty: to "administer the law tempering justice with mercy." If we render the Hindu pandit's translation back into English, as strictly as we can, it reads, "My duty from my status as judge is to stop harm-bringing things." [19] We can read the judge's own conception as a duty, tempered by mercy, to the law. The pandit's conception was of the judge as a direct protector of the community, a protector of public order itself. Secondly the judge saw his duty as one of administration. A judge has cases brought to him, he resolves their ambiguities and designates their outcomes in his judgements. The pandit saw the judge as an agent in a battle against evil influences, a direct intervener into the affairs of public life. The pandit's view of the judge merges his function with that of government in general -- just as the court defendants addressed the judge as "sarkar," "yes, o Government." The pandit and the rest of the Indian community perhaps viewed both judges and the government of Fiji in the same terms as governments in India were traditionally understood -- as defenders of dharma, establishers of proper order, and suppressors of all forms of disorder and pollution.

In any case the Indians regarded the judges and high government officials as their protectors and defenders. When the Goanese had his pipe slapped from his mouth by a police Inspector, he not only sued the Inspector, he also wrote a letter to the Colonial Secretary. At a more significant moment, during the 1920 strike, Indians in Rewa requested that the Governor come to meet them to discuss the strike and their grievances. As the Raju Report, compiled by a visiting delegation from India, opined, "They feared that powerful influences were working against them; but if only they could meet the Governor face to face, they still hoped for redress. [20]

While this kind of adulation had cultural roots, we should note two further things about it. The first is that the mystique of rulers as benificent and wise was also an image promoted by the symbolism of the British monarchy, which the British (and Fijians) take very seriously to this day. In the colonial context, non-whites especially were constantly asked to express, both in ceremony and in private, their loyalty to their benevolent superiors, and they were carefully scrutinized in their responses. The second point is that if the Indians in Fiji had to place their alliegance somewere within the European society of this time, then their alliegance was not misplaced. Most legislation concerning Indian rights, and all of the legal ameliorations of their status and work conditions came from the top -- ultimately from London (which was often responding to pressure from India). The courts as well were very genuine aids to the Indians. The Indians in Fiji developed a reputation for being very litigatious, but this was not mere inclination, being at least in part, a true necessity. The courts were the only recourse when the Moores and Spaeths of the colonial world seized property and denied rights.

This is of course the reason why 1912 was a major turning point for the Indians of Fiji. September 5, 1912 was the day Manilal arrived in Fiji, but perhaps the true watershed was October 29, 1912, the day Manilal's application to practice law in Fiji was accepted, the day he was admitted to the bar. The Indians in Fiji finally had what they needed -- their own lawyer, a man anyone could speak to, and trust.

Description of one court action will be sufficient to explain Manilal's impact. In early April, 1913, Manilal came to Suva Police Court and withdrew a divorce petition

MANILAL

on behalf of the plaintiff. The matter, he said, had been settled out of court, and he moved that the court award no costs. The defense lawyer, Humphrey Berkeley's son, was outraged. He accused Manilal of professional misconduct, of consulting his client behind his back, and approaching his client to settle without consent. Manilal explained. He had not approached anyone. Berkeley's client had come to him, and in Manilal's chambers the settlement had been arranged. Berkeley's office was even represented -- Manilal had called in George Suchit, Berkeley's Hindi-speaking clerk-translator. Berkeley was still outraged, tasting for the first time perhaps the flavour of arrangements made beyond his competence, in a language he did not understand. He became abusive in court, attacking not Manilal but his client, whom he said was a known adulterer. "His Worship told Mr. Berkeley that he should not say that " (FIJI TIMES April 5, 1913). Then the judge considered the arguments about costs. Manilal lost his petition for no award of costs. Simply because Berkeley had been retained, he was owed something.

But the greater victory that day by far was for the Indian community in general. It was no longer business as usual for the white lawyers. The Europeans of the courts no longer held a monopoly on the legal fate of the Indians. Indians' legal business did not even have to be conducted entirely in English, and did not have to depend on a white lawyer's consent. In this case at least, the divorce was not arranged by way of one of Berkeley's contracts. With the appearence of Manilal Indians could present legal grievances and make their legal plans, even, as in this case, work out a settlement, without dependence on the uncertain vehicles of foreign language and the white lawyers' methods. Further, under Manilal's leadership they could begin true political activity as well.

In years to come there would be strikes and traumatic violence that severely shook Indians' faith in the Government's high officials. During the 1920 strike, the Indians exempted the households of the Governor, the Colonial Secretary and the Chief Justice from the walkout of servants, but Cecil Rodwell, the Governor, not only refused the invitation to meet but called out troops to suppress their action with force. In the wake of such trauma, Indian leaders such as Badir Maharaj, Vishnu Deo, S.B. Patel and A.D. Patel continued the political tradition begun in Fiji by Manilal, that of using the law and legal principle as a political weapon for Indians. They inquired into Government

records, made arguments on sound principles and precedents and sought specifications on Indians' rights and status -- sought in short to use the formal equality of the Indians before the law as leverage for improving their substantive position elsewhere. Because of the structure of the colonial civil society, the law with its formal equalities was the field in which attacks could most effectively be formulated, and thus political work was always in large measure legal work. In 1912 that legal and political work in the interest of the Fiji Indians had truly just begun, and by all accounts Manilal was a very busy man.

## NOTES

1. In these statistics the figures derived from the register for 1912 have been adjusted because three circuit court sittings of the Supreme Court were, unaccountably, never entered into the main register. Data regarding them was compiled from the newspaper; without its inclusion, the figures of 1912 were abnormally low -- only 40 cases, 33 against Indians, only 3 death penalties, etc. It is possible that court sittings are also missing for some other years.

2. This quotation is from CSO minute paper 3121/1893, and is also quoted in K.L. Gillion, FIJI'S INDIAN MIGRANTS (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962) p. 116.

3. In all criminal cases I intend to avoid naming names -- mainly in order to prevent misapprehensions about ancestors among descendants, because a remarkable number of girmitiyas had identical names. Where I have substituted a capital letter or other identification for a name in quotation from court records, I have used square brackets. All round brackets were found in the orginal records.

4. For more details see the table on p.74 of Vijay Naidu, THE VIOLENCE OF INDENTURE (University of the South Pacific, 1980).

5. This explanation is accepted also by scholars such as Ahmed Ali and Vijay Naidu. See Naidu, pp.69-73, and Ahmed Ali, PLANTATION TO POLITICS: STUDIES ON FIJI INDIANS (University of the South Pacific, 1980) p.9. Both writers accept the idea that a disproportion of the sexes led naturally to the violence.

6. from CSO m.p. 1626/1913. Also quoted by Ali, p.10.

7. J.W. Burton, THE FIJI OF TO-DAY (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1910) p.316.

8. Walter Gill, TURN NORTH-EAST AT THE TOMBSTONE (Adelaide: Rigby Ltd, 1970) p.59, provides one example, from a request to one of his sardars: "If Baldeo and Churru were to work again on the boilers, could they be on different shifts, because their woman still refused to lie with one while the other was in the room." Gill added, "For the lady's

sake, the request was granted."

9. Burton p.290.

10. See Gill chapter 8. The phrase and sentence quotations are from p.80, the words from pp.76-77.

11. Gill p.55.

12. It is true that they were not noted as married on their indenture passes or in the General Register of Indian Immigrants. They had, however, registered together for immigration, at the same place the same day, registry #s 70 and 71, depot numbers 386 & 387, ship numbers 315 & 316. Thus they certainly travelled as a married couple. Remember also that they had only been on the estate three weeks when the murder occured. In any case, does the planter mean to imply that the sardar had full rights to any woman not officially registered as married?

13. See for instance Gill's account of the suppression of a nascent riot over a wounding threat, pp.112-115.

14. Not only was such information kept out of the press accounts, but indeed, it was ignored in the trials themselves. The overseers' involvements were mentioned only in the Indians' testimony, and I have never seen a case in which an overseer or sardar was called to give evidence about his alleged sexual relations with a victimized woman.

15. Gill p.43

16. see e.g. Burton p.291. The overseer sent to jail in the case described above also provides the single exception I have found to this generalization. This makes him, I think, a historically significant figure, so I will provide his name -- R.M.Johansen. Johansen was tried in 1912, immediately on his release after serving his jail sentence, for raping a coolie woman. The story told by coolie witnesses was that he had the woman dragged to his room by sardars (who were also charged as accessories), in much the manner Gill described the woman once being dragged out for him by sardars. (Gill p.81). He then allegedly tried to make her drink alcohol, then allegedly raped her. He was found innocent by the European jury before the defense presentation even concluded, because a handful of other young white men testified that he had been with them at a picture show on the evening in question. According to the FIJI TIMES

account, the white prosecutor, Fiji's Acting Attourney General of the day, launched "a most searching, and at times bitter cross-examination" against the alibi defense, but it held. (December 3 1912)

17. A later editorial made this point clearly:

> if these people are allowed to exercise the power of franchise, irrespective of their knowledge of, and interest in, local affairs, it will simply mean that the town is at the mercy of any one European or Asiatic individual who is clever, or rich, enough to canvas the majority of votes; and for any town to be at the mercy of one man, whatever his race, is without a doubt detrimental to it best interest. (November 5, 1912)

18. A.B.Brewster THE HILL TRIBES OF FIJI (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1922) p.300. Brewster, aka A.Brewster Joske, presided over the Tavua Magistrate's Court, and was Commissioner for Colo North.

19. Ram Chandra Sharma, FIJI DIGDARSHAN (Mandawar, U.P.: Shree Ram Chandra Pustkalaya, 1937) p.114.

20. also quoted in K.L. Gillion, THE FIJI INDIANS: CHALLENGE TO EUROPEAN DOMINATION 1920-1946 (Australia National University Press, 1973) p.28.

# ADDENDA

While preparing MY 21 YEARS for publication I have come across more historical information which might be of interest to readers. First, government records concerning the **Clansman** case provide further illumination of the process by which the Punjabis lost three quarters of their money. Second, a confidential case from 1924 has come to light, in which writings of Totaram Sanadhya and Benarsidas Chaturvedi in India led to a peculiar sort of investigation into an Indian grievance in Fiji.

## The final reckoning of the **Clansman** case

It was described in the Appendix essay how Berkeley manipulated accounting procedures to secure his own profit and advance his own interests. However, government records of the sale of the **Clansman** reveal that many others also took a generous share of the Punjabis' money. To get a fuller picture of the number of individuals and public and private institutions who, on solid legal grounds, took full recompense for themselves before the Punjabis received their meagre returns, we need only consider the accounts of the final sale of the **Clansman**, prepared by Morris Hedstrom Limited, and the legal firm of Crompton and Muspratt, which is still on file in the Fiji National Archives, in Colonial Secretary's Office minute paper #4816 of 1912.

The **Clansman** was sold on July 31 to the Union Steamship Coy. of New Zealand for £475. If this amount in full had been returned to the Punjabis, they would have had close to half their original money back. Instead, however, Cromptons and Morris Hedstrom made several deductions and gave the government only £283.1.2 for the Punjabis' benefit. The largest single deduction was an advance of £140 given on May 7 against the eventual sale. This advance was not for the Punjabis, but rather for the European crew that had been hired to undertake the journey of the **Clansman** to points east. Even though this crew never sailed the **Clansman** anywhere, and even though the Punjabis were told that the money tied up in the **Clansman** was unavailable until the boat was sold, these Europeans were able to arrange a tidy settlement for themselves that included passages for all to Sydney. Another set of deductions from the sale sum

were for expenses connected with the boat: £2.10.0 for towing, £10.1.0 for a watchman, 2/6 for "goods." Finally, Morris Hedstrom Limited made deductions for their own financial benefit. Connected with the advance, which they considered a mortgage, were mortgage and mortgage registration fees totaling £6.6.0, and a further interest charge of £3.5.10. Further, they charged a 5% commission on the sale, i.e. £23.15.0.

Crompton and Muspratt took the £288.19.8 remaining from Morris Hedstrom Limited and then made deductions of their own: £5.5.0 for the probate of Humphrey Berkeley's will, and 13/6 for other court fees. They then turned over the remainder, £283.1.2, to the Government for distribution to the Punjabis.

In all these proceedings, everyone except the Punjabis got full value for every claim they made. The Punjabis alone of those involved were without legal skills, standing and leverage, and they alone bore all costs and losses for the entire affair. The only exception to this generalization is that the Government did not charge them for the case brought on their behalf. This was considered but was found to be both inappropriate and impossible anyway, since technically the case was brought by a government officer.

The same CSO minute paper, #4816 of 1912, also includes the petition from the Punjabis asking the government to take court action on their behalf. All forty-six Punjabis marked the petition, but only sixteen of them could sign their names, and of these, fifteen out of sixteen signatures were in devanagari, unreadable to untrained Europeans. Only one could sign with roman letters; thirty simply marked with an "x." The petition itself was written in English. However it was not prepared by the Punjabis, but instead by an Indian interpreter, Abdul Aziz Khan, who notes at its end that he has "Interpreted and explained the contents to the persons who signed this before me."

## The complaint against Dr. Carew, 1924

On 11 January, 1924, Benarsidas Chaturvedi published the following item in AJ, i.e. "TODAY," a Hindi language newspaper circulated from Benares in India. This translation is the work of Vishnu Deo, done for the Fiji government

while he was a government clerk:

## INHUMANITY IN FIJI

Today, when I am getting ready to proceed to Kenya, I have received a letter from Fiji which I quote for reference exactly as it is.

Shriyut Mahabir Singh writes from Ba:--

"The whites here are playing havoc. On the 21st November my daughter-in-law suddenly took ill seriously. I sent my servant to Dr. Carew to tell him "Mahabir Singh has sent for you, his daughter-in-law is very seriously ill." My servant very humbly begged Dr. Carew and the Doctor said "Alright, I shall charge 100 rupees as my fee, and require a Motor Car for my conveyance to and from. My servant agreed to comply with his demands. Then the Sahib said "You people are a bad lot, in 1921 you went on strike, you bloddy swine get away." Then my servant quietly returned and told me all that had happened. There are several witnesses to the effect that the Doctor did not come to my house even when 100 rupees were offered to him. On the second occasion I personally went to the Doctor and entreated him to come. The Doctor rebuked me and said "Get away from here." My house is about two miles away from the Doctor's quarters. But the Doctor did not come. At 12 o'clock my daughter in-law died. She was expected to confine within about two weeks. The foetus had reached maturity. If the Doctor had come she might not have died."

By taking revenge on the pregnant innocent Indian woman of a strike of labourers which took place two years previously the white Doctor has proved how much the hearts of the whites in Fiji are black and calumniated and how much they have fallen from humanity. Such events remind me of the would be battle that is to be fought by the coloured and white races. Undoubtly the cruel hearted whites like Dr. Carew are bringing nearer the date of this battle.

Totaram Sanadhya read this item, and within the week of its publication, sent it to RAJDUT, the Fiji Government Hindi language newspaper of the time, demanding an explanation. Vishnu Deo also translated his letter from Hindi to English for the Fiji government:

Office of the Indian Overseas
Information Bureau
Savarmati, Ahmedabad, Gujarat,
16.1.24

To the Editor RAJDUT
Suva, Fiji

Sir,

I am sending you herewith a newspaper. Please peruse the column marked in red. This letter was sent in for publication by Mahabir Singh of the district of Ba. If the content of the letter published is true it can be said that bad treatment is meted out to Indians in Fiji. If Dr. Carew, the District Medical Officer, Ba, has made this blunder there is nothing worse than this. I hope you will, after making enquiries, make this matter clear through the medium of your journal RAJDUT. I am intending to place this matter before the Legislative Assembly of India but shall await the arrival of a reply from you. In conclusion I request the Colonial Secretary to give certain instructions to the District Medical Officers under him as to the treatment of such cases and demand an explanation from Dr. Carew as to why he did not visit Mahabir Singh's daughter-in-law when the fee that he demanded was offered to him, consequence of which was the death of the woman. From the reply given by the Doctor to Mahabir Singh one cannot but think that his heart is full of malice against Indians.

This letter will reach you in the month of February and please reply to it as soon as possible. This matter is being commented upon in the Indian papers.

Your Well Wisher
Pandit Totaram Sanadhya

We find in these texts the same combination of radical criticism and hope for reform within the system that was typical of many Indian critics of colonialism of the time. On the one hand, Chaturvedi went so far as to anticipate a race war, and to castigate the Europeans as black-hearted: on the other, Sanadhya wrote to the Fiji government newspaper hoping for some kind of locally sponsored investigation to settle the matter. And we also find, in the government's handling of the complaint, many of the European attitudes and behaviors which MY 21 YEARS described.

The editor of RAJDUT, J.S. Neill, who was also Agent-General for Immigration and Acting Principal Assistant Colonial Secretary, passed the matter on to the (Acting) Governor, T.E. Fell. In a confidential minute Neill suggested that Dr. Carew be sent copies of the translated texts and asked "to comment," and also that the Ba District Commisioner visit Mahabir Singh "and ask him if he is prepared to substantiate his statements." Fell agreed to Neill's proposals, deferring an offical enquiry, and stipulated that Mahabir Singh should be contacted only after Dr. Carew comments were obtained. Fell wrote:

> If Dr. Carew says the statement is untrue, or otherwise grossly exaggerated, Mahabir Singh can be asked what he means by sending such statements to India, and whether he still adheres to them. In that case, if the C.M.O. so advises, an official enquiry can be held.

Thus, for the investigation of a publicized Indian complaint, government officers of the highest rank arranged an informal investigation, and prearranged that the C.M.O., the Chief Medical Officer, must advise so before an official enquiry was conducted. In MY 21 YEARS, in cases such as the attack against Kunti, governmental investigations were depicted as primarily attempts to force the Indians involved to withdraw their complaints. So too it would seem from the government records: rather than beginning with a visit to Mahabir Singh to properly record the allegation, the case began with the word of the accused, with instructions to use them to ask Mahabir Singh "what he means by sending such statements to India."

On 10 March 1924, Dr, Carew received copies of the two translated documents, and a handwritten note from the C.M.O. asking for his comments. His reply, handwritten and dated

2 April, 1924, ran more that seven pages, from which I excerpt the most relevant passages below:

> When asked to comment on such a report it is difficult for any medical man to sit down and write in calmness.
>
> It is to be regretted that the editor of the Indian paper AJ should be so anxious to rush to print, an unconfirmed report, as if it were ... undoubted truth. It is one further illustration of the sport which needs must turn every incident into Indian political propaganda.
>
> During my short time at Ba I invariably attended Indians without asking whether they could pay or not and I certainly never demanded a fee (tho I should think entitled to) prior to visiting one on a sick call. I have attended many without fee of any kind.
>
> To come to the specific charge of Mahabir Singh ... I wish to state emphatically that the words he attributes to me were never uttered to me. I do not speak Hindustani and my interpreter was usually the Indian houseboy. The one employed by me on the date mentioned was one temporarily engaged for a few days before my leaving Ba owing to the disappearance (after being paid) of my usual boy, and any conversation with an Indian who called on November 21st was carried on through this temporary boy.
>
> ... Added to the worry of breaking up a house packing, handing over, etc., I had had as well an extremely strenuous time for days previously owing to several serious cases. On the morning of Nov 21st I had only got to bed between 3 and 4am having been up all the previous two nights and in constant attendance on a Mrs. Oldham (C.S.R. Co.) who was giving birth to her first child at the age of 41 years! & who was without any trained nurses (hence my constant attendance) as can easily be verified.
>
> ... Through the houseboy I understood that the man's wife was sick and he wanted me to visit her. I asked could he not bring her into hospital

as I was very busy ... I told my boy to tell the Indian to get a motor car and to come quickly as I was very busy. There was I remember much conversation between them -- not understood by me, I said "Tell him to get away at once and get that car." He then left.

... A couple of hours after, the Indian (the same man I thought till reading report) returned, and I was angry he did not bring the motor [car], as I had much work awaiting me. He had conversation with the boy and I could not understand what he meant by delay and loss of time. I told the boy to tell him that if he wanted me he must bring a car and to get away at once and to do so quickly and I waved my arm in the direction of Ba to impress upon him the necessity of speed. He departed and tho I awaited his return for an hour he did not appear -- nor was any car sent. I then proceeded to see my other patients and complete arrangements for my departure from Ba.

In his letter to the editor of the RAJDUT Pandit Totaram Sanadhya -- who apparently accepts fully the facts of Mahabir's garbled report -- "requests the Colonial Secretary to give certain instructions to the District Medical Officers under him as to the treatment of such cases."

May I respectfully request that the Indians be at the same time instructed that they should not leave their sick until they near "in extremis," and that when they, at the last moment, rush up to a doctor's house they must not consider that theirs is the only case of sickness in the district, but to understand there may be others with an equal claim on the doctor's immediate attention.

I have further the honour to request the permission of the Colonial Secretary, to bring this charge and the entire correspondence to the notice of the Fiji Branch of the British Medical Association. I do this, that its members may be made fully aware of the appalling chasm or calumnity that they may at any moment find yawning at their feet, through their smallest indiscretion or omission in treatment of Indians, whose [garbled word] are all too ready to turn every incident into a matter

of high political significance.

W.K. Carew
District Medical Officer

Many of the issues of great concern to the participants in this affair seem to be unresolved in the evidence. Was money offered and refused? Were insults delivered? How much about the woman's condition did the doctor understand? However, other basic aspects of the situation are quite clear. There is no record of any further interviews with Mahabir Singh, but the C.M.O. summarized his informal investigation as follows:

> 1. It is agreed on both sides that Indians called twice on Dr. Carew on November 21st to ask him to attend a case of serious illness and that he did not go. 2. I have ascertained also that Mahabir Singh's house is about two miles from the D.M.O.s quarters, that Mahabir Singh's wife[sic] died in childbirth on November 21st and that "there was much talk about it among the Indians at the time."

What is also clear is that the racism inherent in the colonial system had a tremendous influence on colonial medical practice. Dr. Carew could not tell the difference between one Indian caller and another, and did not know ahead of time about the pregnancy coming to term of an Indian woman living within two miles of his own house, but he knew that Mrs. Oldham was forty-one years old and was having her first child. The discrepancy is reflected in his practice: for her he could devote two entire nights, while for the Indians he was too busy packing.

Finally, what is most clear is the heightening and the politicization of the rhetoric of both sides. Dr. Carew rightly accused Benarsidas Chaturvedi of jumping into print in quest of political gain, but he too wanted to take the correspondence to his own public forum, and warn his peers about the tendencies of Indians. In his enthusiasm, he even seemed to claim that failing to treat an Indian patient, who subsequently died, should be counted among proper medical men as the "smallest indiscretion or omission."

The investigation described here ended with two letters

being sent, one to Carew telling him "it was unfortunate" that he had not discovered the urgency of the case and the closeness of the patient, and the other to Totaram Sanadhya, denying that Carew asked for a fee or said the things attributed to him. On these points the government simply presumed Carew's denials as facts. Totaram was also informed that the Fiji government found it "unfortunate" that AJ printed the letter from Fiji without "verification of the facts." The Fiji government also considered raising a libel prosecution against AJ on Carew's behalf, and then rejected it on the grounds that the proceedings would have to take place in India. Carew, for his part, was given permission to inform his branch of the British Medical Association about the case, as long as he did not disclose the contents of official correspondence.

Carew was of course quite right in deploring the state of affairs in which Indians sought medical help from European doctors only as a last resort, and often when it was already too late. Totaram Sanadhya's optimism in writing to the Fiji government to protest a paradigmatic case of the failures of that system did not result in any reforms, but it at least brought an instance of injustice to official attention. After all, one of the main features of the colonial order was the radical gap in what was thought and known between the races. Another example of this gap is a final astonishing aspect of this case. J.S. Neill was RAJDUT editor and resident Indian affairs expert for the Fiji government of the time. In his original minute concerning the translated correspondence and his proposed plans for enquiry, he defined AJ as an Indian newspaper and described Benarsidas Chaturvedi as "a member of the Swaraj party" and "the recipient of many letters from Indians in Fiji." However, he wrote, "I do not know anything" about Totaram Sanadhya. Thus, ten years after the publication of MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS, despite the controversy about Fiji it raised in India, despite its numerous calls for reforms of specific social and governmental practices in Fiji, despite the fame of its "author" among Indians both in India and in Fiji, the Indian affairs expert of the Fiji government had not yet read the book, or even heard of Totaram. Such was the colonial system for Indians in Fiji.

John Dunham Kelly

## NOTES ON THE TRANSLATORS

Uttra Kumari Singh and John Dunham Kelly worked on the translation of this book, and John Kelly did the background research, in 1984 and 1985, when Kelly was a Ph. D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Chicago, pursuing his doctoral research on Indo-Fijian history and culture. He received his Ph. D. in 1988, for a dissertation entitled BHAKTI AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM IN FIJI.
He now teachers anthropology at Princeton University.

A Hindi teacher by profession, Mrs. Uttra Singh has taught for the United States Peace Corps, for Catholic priests and nuns, and in secondary schools, most recently Dudley High School. She was a copywriter at Radio Fiji and has contributed articles to Shanti Dut. In 1985 she studied in India, receiving a Diploma in Hindi from the Central Institute of Hindi, New Delhi.

Totaram Sanadhya came to Fiji as a girmitiya, or indentured labourer, in 1893. In 1914, he returned to India and together with Benarsidas Chaturvedi wrote this book, a powerful indictment of the indentured labour system and the treatment of Indians in Fiji. In India MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS was immediately translated from Hindi into several other South Asian languages. It was one of the most frequently used sources of information and argument during the public movement in India that led to the abolition of Indenture in the 1910's, the movement Gandhi later called the first national satyagraha.' However, until now no English translation of it has been published.

MY TWENTY-ONE YEARS IN THE FIJI ISLANDS provides a vivid account of the lives of Indians, indentured and free, in early Fiji: the coolie ships, the coolie lines, the struggles with overseers and law courts, the towns, the bazaars, and Indian religious rituals and festivals. An appendix to the book provides further information about people, places and events described. And this volume also includes an English translation of Totaram Sanadhya's THE STORY OF THE HAUNTED LINE, a moving story of a man saved from fear and despair by Hindu devotion and the friendship of ethnic Fijians.

This book is a window into early Fiji as seen by the immigrants from India. It should be of interest to anyone who seeks to understand Fiji's history.